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Adventure

November 15th

A Complete Novel of
Flying *and* Circus Life
by
THOMSON BURTIS

Published Twice a Month

NOVEMBER 15th ISSUE, 1928
VOL. LXVIII No. 5

ADVENTURE

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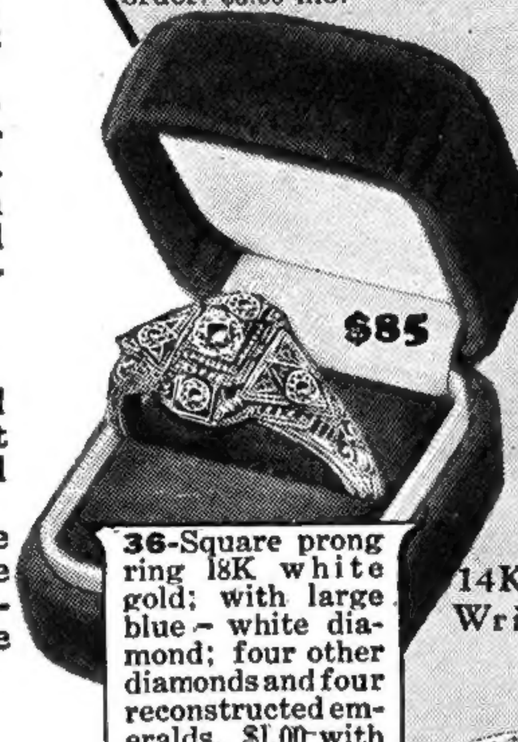

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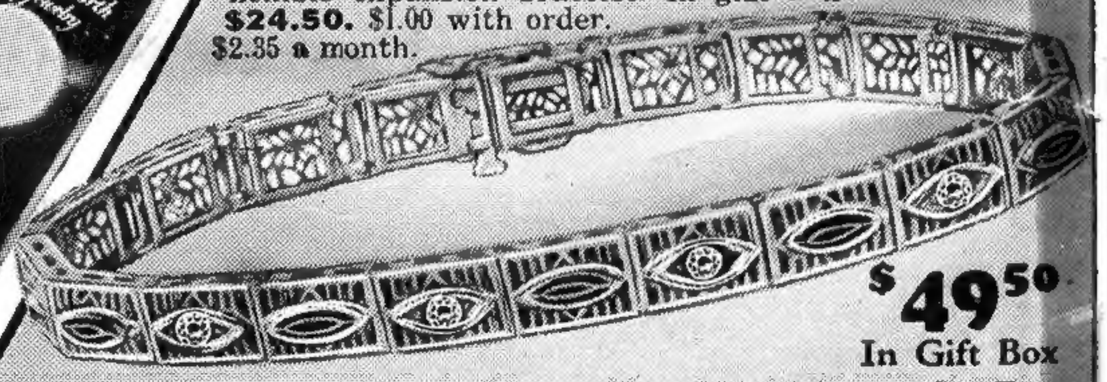

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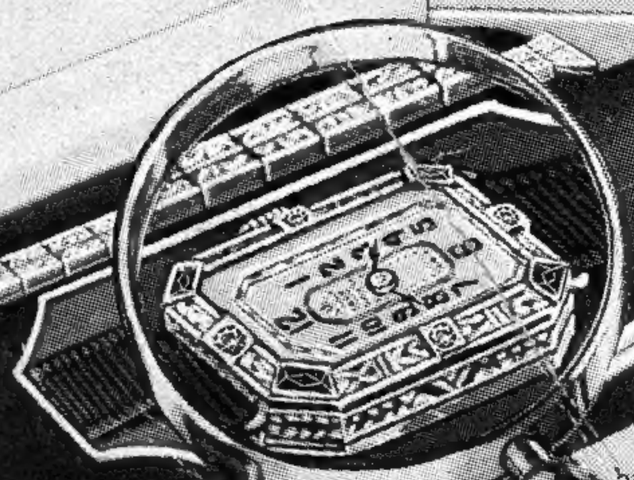

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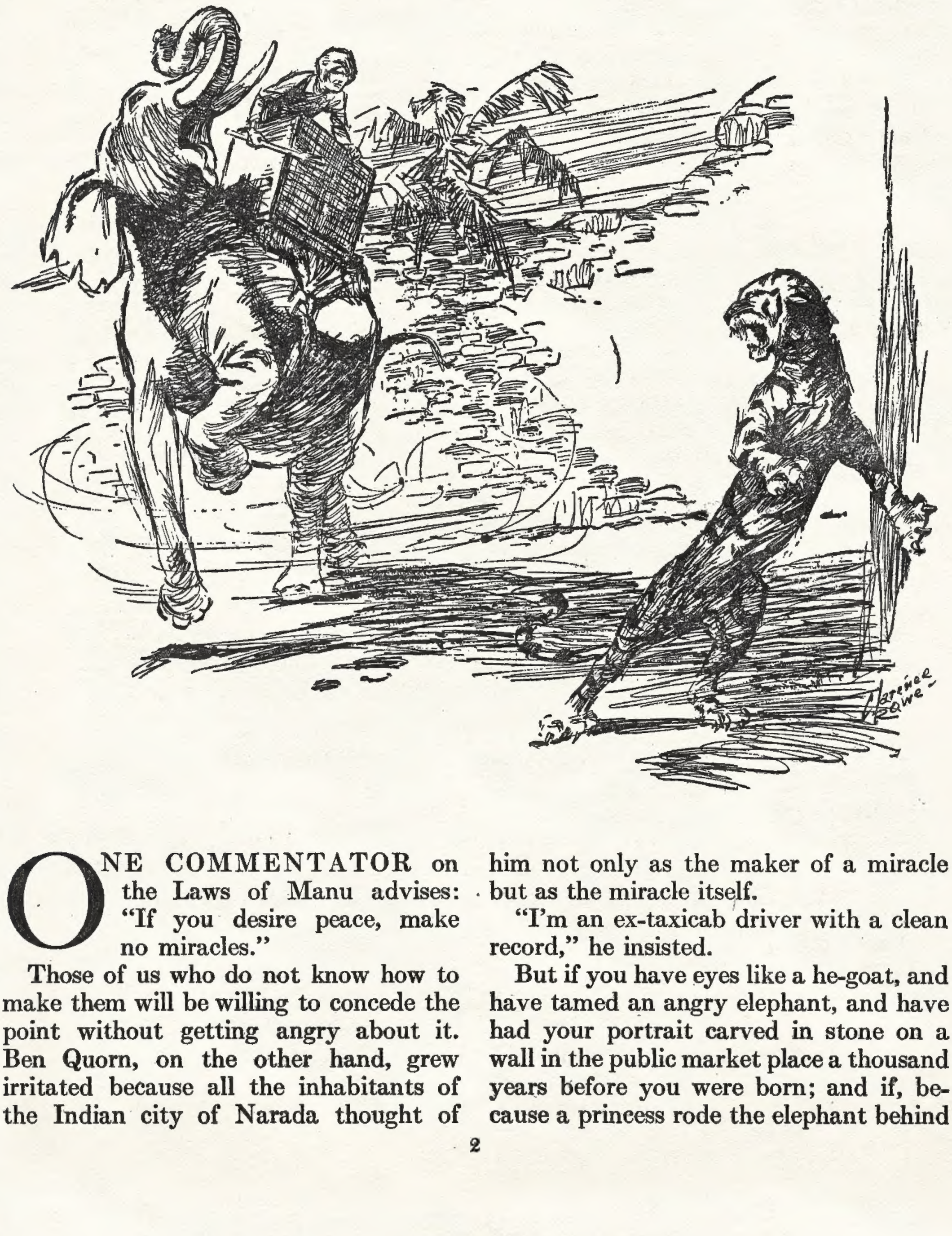
Cover Design by Duncan MacMillan *Headings by Clarence Rowe*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; B. C. Dunklin, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered: Copyright, 1928, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

Another graphic tale of Ben Quorn,

The Big League MIRACLE



ONE COMMENTATOR on the Laws of Manu advises: "If you desire peace, make no miracles."

Those of us who do not know how to make them will be willing to concede the point without getting angry about it. Ben Quorn, on the other hand, grew irritated because all the inhabitants of the Indian city of Narada thought of him not only as the maker of a miracle but as the miracle itself.

"I'm an ex-taxicab driver with a clean record," he insisted.

But if you have eyes like a he-goat, and have tamed an angry elephant, and have had your portrait carved in stone on a wall in the public market place a thousand years before you were born; and if, because a princess rode the elephant behind

taxi driver, in India's sacred realm

By TALBOT MUNDY

you after you had tamed him, and in consequence was released from the law that keeps royal Indian ladies behind curtains; and if, in consequence of that, you are held to have fulfilled an ancient prophecy and have been appointed superintendent of the rajah's elephants, there is no peace for you—none whatever, as Quorn discovered.

It was wonderful at first, with thirty-four great elephants and thirty-four mahouts to do his bidding. Quorn took enormous pride in the elephants because, for some strange reason, they appeared to love him. When he entered the great compound under the *neem* trees within the ancient limestone wall, and the rising sun was gilding everything with pale gold through which crowds of bright green parakeets wove sudden patterns, then Quorn enjoyed even the sacred monkeys that were blamed for stealing the elephants' grain, which of course the mahouts had really sold, or swapped for strong drink.

The monkeys would scamper away, being reputed sacred, whereas they knew, of course, that they were nothing of the kind, so they had guilty consciences and preferred not to be noticed. But four and thirty enormous elephants would salute Quorn, raising their trunks in air; and there would be tantrums and sulking all day long if he passed by one of them without some sort of recognition. Wordless it might be, and even motionless; but Quorn had discovered that there is a bond of sympathy between beast and man, along which flows mutual understanding if you have the trick.

"You stand still, and you like 'em, and they get you—same as a girl gets the smell o' roses," was Quorn's way of explaining it.

"YOU ASTONISH me with the way you manage elephants," the rajah said one morning. "Some men born to the business don't do as well as you. How is it that you know how?"

"Don't need to know how, sir," Quorn retorted. "It's like the rajah business. Your ministers know all the rigmarole. If things ain't working right, I guess you get yourself a new crew. Same here. These heathen mahouts they all know elephant; I make 'em do their stuff. That's all there is to it."

The rajah endured that comment on his statesmanship with royal patience. But whenever he was patient he had deep motives. Quorn who had learned a lot since he came to Narada had not discovered that yet.

"Are you good with other animals?" the rajah asked him.

"Had a dog once. Got run over by a truck."

"Did you ever see a tiger?"

"Plenty—at the circus. I've sometimes wondered, sir, whether them brutes aren't overrated. Such as I've seen was lazy. Folks 'd think 'em terrible ferocious when they'd yawn and stretch 'emselves, but they look to me like out size pussy cats—good lookers, but not much to be skeered of. Maybe I'm ignorant."

The rajah smiled. He watched Quorn count out stalks of sugar cane to make sure that the mahouts had stolen none of

it; he watched him dose a two ton stomach ache with laudanum and then put fly bane on the edge of a ragged ear.

"Tigers," he said presently, "are not half as dangerous as elephants. A tiger can onl / bite and claw. An elephant can crush. I have seen many a tiger and many a man crushed flat under an elephant's paw. There are three elephants in this compound that have killed both men and tigers!"

After which the rajah rode away. And presently came Moses, who had been watching both of them, but especially watching the rajah's tell tale eyes. Moses was Quorn's Eurasian servant, who, being one eyed, sometimes saw only half of anything; and being half white he only told half secrets; but the other half of him being Oriental, the important part of every secret remained hidden in the dim recesses of his mind.

"If I were you, Mr. Quorn, I think I would return to the United States," he suggested.

"You ain't me," Quorn retorted, "and you haven't ever hunted a job back where I come from."

"Are there temple priests there, Mr. Quorn?"

"Maybe. I've driven most sorts of folks. I reckon priests ain't worse than politicians."

Moses changed the subject:

"Aren't you coming home to tiffin, Mr. Quorn? I've brought your sun spectacles."

Quorn had taken to wearing goggles in the streets because they reduced his strange resemblance to the Gunga Sahib, whose portrait, riding on an elephant, had been carved a thousand years ago on the limestone market wall. He hated to be stared at, and he did not enjoy the thought of looking like a heathen Hindu who had been dead for centuries.

He was usually in a hurry to get home to the midday meal, because the sight of an elephant eating a hundred pounds of hay aroused his appetite. But this time Moses led him down the long street called Pul-ke-nichi, meaning "underneath the bridge", the street where the fortune tellers and the nostrum sellers do a roaring business in between the offices of money lenders and the booths of cheap jack merchants. It is a smelly street, but interesting. Quorn protested, but Moses pleaded—

"It is necessaree that I show you something, Mr. Quorn."

SO PRESENTLY they stood beneath the bridge, where Moses shyly indicated the cause of their walking out of their way in the heat of an Indian noon. It is a very ancient bridge, and beautiful because time has smoothed it and obliterated all its builder's sins. It connects two ancient temples built on low hills known as Kali's Bosom. But nowadays the priests of those two temples are not on speaking terms except when they meet to agree on fines and penances to be imposed on other people, so there are no longer glorious processions from one temple to the other, and men have grown so superstitious about crossing the bridge that the grass grows in the cracks of the limestone pavement and the doves build nests on the shoulders of gods and goddesses that face inward from the parapet on either side, cooing there all day long as if there were no such thing as hawks in the azure heaven.

"Will you kindlee look at that," said Moses.

Carved on the wall of the limestone arch beneath the bridge there was a tiger being led into what appeared to be a temple door, by a lady who wore jeweled anklets. The tiger had some sort of collar and she led him with her left hand. In her right hand there were flowers.

"For her funeral, after the tiger eats her," Quorn suggested, but driving cabs in Philadelphia had not made him an authority on mystic symbolism.

"No, that is an ancient prophetic utterance," said Moses. "That is said to be the same princess whom the man named Gunga Sahib rescued on an elephant from durance vile, only he did not finish doing so because the elephant killed him. And it is part of the legend that after the ele-

phant slew the Gunga Sahib, her angree royal parent put her into a tiger's cage in a courtyard of this temple. Nevertheless she tamed the tiger and led him forth across the bridge into that other temple. And people say—"

"Shucks!" remarked Quorn. "People are always talking bunk."

"And people say," said Moses, "that you are Gunga Sahib come to life again, because you look like Gunga Sahib and because you tamed the big elephant and brought the Princess Sankyamuni into the city on his back."

"They're looney."

"And they say that consequentlee the Princess Sankyamuni must be that princess of the legend, also returned into the world to finish that which was begun by Gunga Sahib but not finished, many centuries ago."

"Meaning she's got to be et by the tiger?" Quorn suggested.

Moses preferred to offer no opinion as to that, and Quorn was hungry, so they made haste to the gate house of the abandoned mission where Quorn lived nominally as caretaker, although Moses did the actual loafing around the place, which was all that the task amounted to.

And while Quorn sat eating curry and rice, came Bamjee, the rajah's business agent—Bamjee the ex-telegrapher, with his big head blazing in a flame colored turban, his big eyes observing everything through gold rimmed spectacles, his big mouth showing white teeth in a smile that would have thawed a money lender, and his undersized body resplendent in a gray silk suit. A very prosperous and distinguished *babu*, with a B.A. degree, a platinum watch chain and no advertised prejudices. Being also a person of tact, he took one of the chairs in the shade of the porch until Quorn had finished eating, which gave him plenty of time to consider how to break his rather awkward news; so he was ready by the time Quorn filled his pipe and came and sat beside him. When Bamjee was ready, very often all the unseen wheels beneath the surface of Narada began moving.

"MR. QUORN, the priests are very much offended with you."

"Me?"

"Because you brought the Princess Sankyamuni through the city on the back of that great elephant Asoka and all the people said you are the Gunga Sahib come to life again. They said also that an ancient prophecy has been fulfilled. Therefore, as you know, the priests were obliged to agree that the Princess Sankyamuni shall be released from *purdah* and may go where she pleases in public without losing caste. The priests could not help it. But they consider it a very bad example to the other Indian ladies, and they are also angry because their hand was forced. So they have revived another ancient legend, according to which the princess whom Gunga rescued was afterwards thrown into a tiger's den. She contrived to tame the tiger and she led him from one temple into another one, across the bridge connecting them.

"Nevertheless, her angry royal parent made her spend all the rest of her days in lonely seclusion because she wished to go about in public and to do good. But it was prophesied that she should be reborn some day, and that people should know her because she would repeat the taming of the tiger. The priests make the logical assertion, Mr. Quorn, that if one prophecy has been fulfilled, then so must that other one be also. Therefore, if the Princess Sankyamuni wishes to be a modern woman and to enjoy her liberty, she must be put into a tiger's den and she must tame him. They have a very ferocious tiger ready for her."

Quorn's pipe went out.

"I ain't no princess. What has the tiger to do with me?" he demanded.

"You are in a predicament, Mr. Quorn. His Highness, the Rajah of Narada, made you superintendent of his elephants in order to be able to protect you from the priests. The crowd has called you Gunga Sahib, and his Highness foresaw how annoyed the priests would be. He was happy to score off the priests. But his Highness is a potentate of sudden grati-

tudes and generosities, who very quickly wearies of being merely philanthropic."

"Cheese it!" Quorn retorted. "I've already saved him nearly half his bill for elephant feed."

Bamjee blinked. As purchasing agent on commission, he was aware that purchases had fallen off since Quorn became superintendent. Quorn could quickly see through the mahouts' little tricks, but he needed time to plumb the depths of Bamjee's mind.

"The Princess Sankyamuni," Bamjee went on, "asked her royal parent for advice concerning this new development. His Highness consulted me. I said that possibly Mr. Quorn, who is so successful with the elephants, can tame a tiger also, and in that case everything might turn out fortunately."

"Trust you not to mind your own business!" remarked Quorn. "So *that's* what he meant this morning when he asked me whether I know tigers."

"Yes, and he wishes you to tame that tiger. Also, the Princess Sankyamuni wants to talk with you," said Bamjee.

"Nix! Nothing doing! I ain't hired to tame tigers! Me, a woman, and a tiger don't mix! Ask the court astrologer; he'll tell you it's in my horoscope."

BUT QUORN was playing against destiny and the cards were stacked.

"She did ask the astrologer," said Bamjee. "The astrologer said that, because of the position of the Sun and Saturn in her Tenth House, if she should tame the tiger she will very soon inherit all her royal parent's dominion and you will become her principal adviser."

"Me?"

"And the worst of it is, Mr. Quorn, that being a woman, and therefore talkative, she told one of her attendants, who told her royal parent what the astrologer said. And consequently, he is naturally not altogether anxious that the tiger should be too tame."

"Jee-rusalem! Moses was right. I'm going home to Philadelphia!"

"Unfortunately, Mr. Quorn, if you should try to go away just now the people would say that because you are undoubtedly a reincarnation of that personage named Gunga, therefore you belong, as it were, to them, and they derive great comfort from having you here in their midst. And of course, there is no railway in Narada, so you would have to go by carriage, which they could very easily prevent. I think they would be so indignant if you should try to go that they might kill you. The priests are most strategic and crowds, being mercurial, are easily influenced, Mr. Quorn. And they are so looking forward to this ceremony with the princess and the tiger that if they were to be deprived of it, there might be riots. And since she can not go through with the ceremony unless you will help her, you would be responsible for the rioting if you should refuse. And if she does not go through with it she will be forced again into seclusion."

"You mean they'd take away her liberty? They'd make her hide behind a curtain all her life?"

"Yes," said Bamjee. "And the princess wishes to talk with you this afternoon at four o'clock."

Quorn could not even light his pipe, he was so upset. Instinct urged him to throw up his job and go home to Philadelphia, disguised if necessary. But he remembered how seasick he had been on the voyage to India. And then, again, there are not many ex-taxi drivers who have an opportunity to talk about a tiger with a princess in her palace while a hundred thousand people almost breathlessly await the outcome.

Pride is subtle stuff, and so is curiosity. He decided he would give his answer when Bamjee should return for him in a royal carriage with two horses that afternoon at half past three. Meanwhile, he would think it over.

But the thinkers are not many. As a commentator on the Laws of Manu says, "They who believe they think are oftener than not like harlots waiting for a lover, knowing neither whence he shall come nor who he may be."

When Bamjee had gone Moses came out from behind the reed blind that hung in the open doorway to keep out heat and dust. He had obviously been listening, which made Quorn unreasonably irritable. And if we won't be reasonable, destiny makes use of our unreasonableness, so says the selfsame commentator, which almost makes it look as if destiny holds the long end of the lever.

"Mr. Quorn, I think that Bamjee wishes to be rid of you because the corn for the elephants no longer is stolen and therefore Bamjee receives less commission. He thinks if you should try to tame the tiger you might be eliminated."

"And you don't want that for fear you might lose your own job cooking for me. Gurr-rrgh! I know you!"

That settled it. Quorn's unreasonable irritation tipped the scale. It caused him to decide to talk things over with the Princess Sankyamuni. He assured himself that a mere discussion commits nobody. But if destiny and a lovely woman are on the same side of the balance, there is not much chance for a man from Philadelphia, or from any other place, to escape without gaining at least experience. Quorn might have thought of that too, but he was angry. Angry men don't think much.

Bamjee arrived silk suited, in a two horsed carriage with a turbaned footman up behind, and Quorn, in his ready made Sunday hand-me-downs and a new white helmet, drove with him to the part of the rajah's palace where the Princess Sankyamuni had already begun to taste the deadly democratic vices. And when the princess came into the great, cool, darkened drawing room, which was furnished in the jazz band Louis Quinze style but looked out on a quiet garden where a fountain played to some thousand year old statues of a dozen or so contemplative gods, there were only nine veiled maidens to protect her from the tongue of scandal; whereas, nineteen surely never would have been enough, when it is remembered that Quorn was the first non-Hindu masculine adventurer to set foot in the palace or to see her face unveiled.

PERHAPS it is not quite accurate to say he saw it, because it dazzled him. To Quorn it seemed that she was even lovelier than on the day of her famous ride behind him on the elephant. She paid the subtle compliment to liberty of wearing only half her jewels, so that there was less to distract attention from her eyes, which, according to Quorn, would have melted cast iron if she had looked at it long enough.

They melted Quorn's heart, timed by his heart beats, in eleven seconds. Trying to describe her afterward to Moses, and remembering the color of her *sari* and the turquoise bracelets on her beautifully modeled feet, he likened her to a nosegay wrapped in tissue paper. But Quorn never had the patience to read poetry, which he regarded as sinful waste of time. His metaphors were like a one horse hearse, suggesting the simplicity imposed by limitations.

The princess sat on an armchair, quite uncomfortable because she was used to lolling on sandal scented swansdown cushions; and her maidens sat around her in a semicircle, blusing behind their veils because they could not hide their pretty feet unless they sat upon them, and there was not room to sit upon them on those French plush covered chairs. Quorn stood, hiding his hands inside his helmet.

Bamjee spoke first, although that was against the court rules as laid down by all palace chamberlains since royalty was first invented; but the silence was becoming awkward.

"Daughter of the Dawn, this *babu* begs you to remember—"

"You may leave us, Bamjee."

He went out bowing, backward, utterly disgusted to discover that a wad of paper had been firmly wedged into the key hole and that the door made too much noise when he tried to clear the keyhole with his fountain pen.

"Shall I call you Gunga Sahib, or do you like your funny foreign name?" the princess asked.

She had a voice like honey oozing from the tips of rose buds. It suggested a vir-

gin's dreams of paradise. It hinted at passion, ripening but not yet ready to be revealed.

"My name's Quorn, miss—beg pardon, miss, I mean, your Highness."

"No, I like miss better. It sounds modern. Won't you sit down?"

Gingerly Quorn arranged himself on a row of brass headed studs at the edge of an imported plush and gilt chair. He hesitated, but decided not to lay his helmet on the floor because, for the first time in his life, he felt ashamed of his horny hands and preferred to hide them. He kept twisting the helmet by the sweat band, as if it were a receptacle in which he hoped to catch some sort of comfort.

"Can you tame a tiger, Mr. Quorn?"

"Me, miss?"

"You did so wonderfully with Asoka, and an elephant is so much bigger than a tiger. Besides, everybody knows that elephants can kill tigers if they can only catch them in a corner. So it stands to reason that whoever can tame the greater can tame the lesser. You have to admit that, Mr. Quorn. You must be logical, now mustn't you? I must have a very savage tiger tamed almost instantly. He has been purposely taught that all men are his enemies, and he is probably rather hungry."

"Gosh, miss, why not feed him?" It was cooler in that room than outside, but Quorn wiped the perspiration from his face.

"That might help, but the priests won't allow it. You see, they suspect I will ask you to help me, and they know you have lots of laudanum for the elephants when they have stomach ache, so they are afraid you might put laudanum in the tiger's meat. I have to lead that tiger out of his den, across the bridge, and into a cage in another temple."

"Asking your pardon for the question, miss, but isn't this proposition kinder crazy?"

"Oh, no. It is just symbolical. I lead hate out of Kali's temple into Siva's, where it is transmuted into love. I have consulted the astrologer. Isn't that what your Christian Daniel did before they threw him into the lion's den?"

"Tigers is different," Quorn objected, groping blindly for an argument. "Miss, isn't there a British political resident in Narada? Do you suppose the British Government 'ud allow a beautiful young lady to be pitched into a den o' tigers? I've heard a lot of criticism of the British, but nothing that bad."

"I believe there is such a person as a resident," said the princess, "but he is absent, fortunately. It would be unendurable, if he should interfere. I am quite sure I am a reincarnation of Sankyamuni; you see, I even have the same name. I am equally sure you are a reincarnation of Gunga Sahib, though you probably did some bad deeds in former lives that merited the *karma* of forgetfulness. I don't remember very clearly either. But I know the legends and the prophecies. You and I have seen one come true, so now let us tackle this one boldly."

QUORN did not feel even slightly bold, but he hated to admit it.

"Tell me about it, miss."

"Didn't Bamjee tell you? The priests say I must lead their tiger over the bridge from Kalil's temple into Siva's, symbolizing the transmutation of death into life—of evil into good—of passion into ecstasy?"

"Why not let them priests do that transmuting, miss?"

"Oh, no. They couldn't possibly. They are only poor priests. You and I are blossoms on a branch of destiny."

"Miss, I haven't done no blossoming since mother used to scrub my ears and pack me off to Sunday school with ten cents for the missionary box."

"If you don't believe in your destiny, then destiny will force you to believe," the princess answered. "For instance, the rajah, my father, insists somebody told him what the astrologer said about my becoming Ranee very soon, and your becoming my confidential adviser, if we face this ordeal bravely. My father hopes, of course, that you will be killed

trying to tame the tiger, and that I will be afraid at the last minute. Then he could simply force me back into seclusion, and that would be the end of me. He would marry me to some one I have never seen. But I would rather die than that. I don't intend to be afraid. I am going through with this—with you or without you, Mr. Quorn."

Admiration took Quorn by the reins with which a man may govern judgment when he is not in the presence of incarnate youth and loveliness—and not for the first time in his life within a palace—and not indignant that a parent should be willing to toss that marvelous young woman to a tiger—and not almost equally indignant because he himself is to be included in the tiger's meal.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "I'd like to put one over on 'em!"

And the princess seized that opportunity as naïvely as she proposed to accept the other one. She sketched the situation swiftly for Quorn's benefit.

"You see, Gunga Sahib—I mean Mr. Quorn, if we succeed in this, we shall have defeated the priests forever. They will never again be able to challenge either of us, because they will have used up all the legends. The priests hate you as much as me. They can't endure to have the crowd regard you as the reincarnation of Gunga Sahib. And yet they themselves have said you are that, because the crowd insisted on it when they saw you ride Asoka. Sooner or later the priests would find some way of killing you, unless we put this over on them as you say. Afterward, when I am ranee, I will be able to protect you and we will do wonderful things."

"And when is all this supposed to happen, miss?"

"Oh, any time. Tomorrow would do nicely."

Quorn scratched his head. He felt like a man in a dream. His reeling brain could suggest no way out of the dilemma. But he was partly Scotch and had to bargain, as he would bargain at the trumpet of Judgment Day.

"Time costs nothing, miss—leastways, not here in Narada. Supposing you was to name a date a little later on. That special bad tiger might up and die on 'em. He might bite a priest and get ptomaine. That'd give us a bit better break. We might ring in a circus tiger, if we had time to shop around a bit, and maybe some o' them half fed subordinate priests might listen to the chink of money."

"The astrologer says we have until the next new moon," the princess answered. "We can't fail if we act before then. But if we wait until after the next new moon we can't succeed."

"Let's see—that's eleven, twelve, thirteen days."

Quorn hated the number thirteen. It invariably made him nervous. It made him so nervous now that he could think of nothing except that glorious pair of eyes that did not know what fear was. He was glad his insurance was paid up.

"Miss," he said, "this proposition is the darn' craziest I ever heard of. But I kinder like you, miss, if you'll excuse my saying so, and if you're all that set on taking such a crazy chance, I'll go you, provided you claim every one o' them thirteen days to give me half a chance to think in, and provided you act the way I warn you when the time comes."

HE KNEW he was behaving like a lunatic, but almost before he had finished speaking he was actually proud of it. The princess gurgled with delight. She rose, and he rose, and he dropped his helmet. Before he could prevent her she had seized his right, rough, horny hand in hers and was kissing it.

"There, there, now, missy, don't you carry on. We'll manage somehow."

She was crying, she was so delighted, and Quorn felt like a man who has been knighted on the field of battle. He trod on his helmet but contrived to pick it up and then backed away toward the door, where he stood holding the crushed helmet in both hands until the princess and her ladies had gone out past the gilt and enamel screen at the opposite side of the

room. Then he opened the door and almost stumbled over Bamjee. The relief was instant. Swift reaction followed upon its heels. Thought flowed in as water flows into a dry sponge. An idea came to him. It was no more crazy than all the rest of it. He seized Bamjee by the throat and shook him, to the exquisite but suppressed delight of several palace servants, bitterly jealous of the business agent.

"You scheming rogue! This is your doing! You've got me into this mess. Now help me out of it! Listen, unless you want to be a legend and a prophecy and walk into that tiger's den ahead o' me, you do exactly what I say and hold your tongue about it. Get me a good tame circus tiger. Get him quick. I'll give you two days. I want him dumped there back of the elephant lines, in the cage in the old shed back of where Asoka's picket is. If he ain't tame, you'll be the first meal he tastes after I take one look at him. Do you get me? One tame tiger, paid for by you and delivered to me in the old shed back of the elephant lines, and not a word said."

Bamjee wished for the use of his windpipe. And, being a person without prejudices, he was quite willing to play anybody's game and sit on either side of anybody's fence. Also he had imagination. There would be a nice, inauditable profit on the tiger; he felt quite sure the princess would pay the bill, even though Quorn should advise her not to. And, being a rajah's purchasing agent, he knew where to shop for every kind of unconventional extravagance, from zoos to Parisian underwear. Bamjee agreed instantly, nodding as well as he could until Quorn let go of his throat.

As they drove away in the two horsed carriage it occurred to Bamjee that Quorn might prove to be the joker in destiny's pack of cards. He had played poker at Calcutta University, where Hindus like to be as debonair and devilish as anybody else. He knew how a joker upsets all calculations. He had once filled a flush with the aid of the joker and won all the other students' money.

"Mr. Quorn, I think you might be wise to trust me," he suggested.

"I'd as soon trust a snake," Quorn assured him.

"But a snake who bites one's enemies is a trustworthy accomplice," Bamjee answered. "Like you, I admire the Princess Sankyamuni, Mr. Quorn. Also, you may remember when you rode on the great elephant Asoka through the city with the princess up behind you, it was I who caused the crowd to recognize you as the Gunga Sahib."

"Yes, you've caused me a heap of trouble," Quorn retorted. "However, let's look at it this way: if you help me and hold your tongue and if we fail, nobody will know you had a hand in it, so you'll make no more enemies than you have already. If you don't help, and if we win, then your job's gone, for I'll guarantee that. But if you do help, and we win, then you can look to the princess for all the patronage you can wallow in, you durned percentage grafter."

"I wish my education had included the art of graceful speech," said Bamjee. "I have only an unpolished smattering of English. Suppose I put it this way: I will scratch your back if you will scratch mine."

"Very well," said Quorn. "I'll go you. But mark my words, I'll have the tiger scratch you good and plenty if you fail me in one particular."

BAMJEE did not mention that he, too, was a target of priestly indignation. Quorn had only perpetrated and unwittingly become a miracle. Bamjee was the man who had proclaimed him, which was worse, and the priests were sure to get him for it some day unless he looked out for himself.

So Bamjee, after depositing Quorn at the elephant lines, drove off with all his ingenuity concentrated on getting the nice tame tiger that Quorn had set his heart on. He knew of a Jain temple where they had a hospital for animals, and where there was a convalescent tiger that

caused the benevolent Jains anxiety because he disliked vegetables.

The Jains refuse to kill for food or for any other reason. He could get that tiger, it occurred to him, for nothing more expensive than a promise to treat the dumb brute kindly. And he could charge for it at market price, which in the case of tigers is elastic and depends on what you want the tiger for, and how badly you want him, and how soon. Bamjee was an excellent man of business, which the Jains reputedly are not, though they can win the heart of any injured animal that is brought into their temple compound. A beautiful, milk fed tiger, reared from a cub in captivity, changed guardians that very evening, and without too much mendacity. Bamjee simply told the venerable Jains that a rajah's daughter desired the lovely creature for a pet.

And so it came to pass that Asoka, the biggest of all the elephants, fidgeted and trumpeted because he could smell tiger somewhere near him. There was a wall between them, and the tiger was locked in a cage in a shed, but the new surroundings had made the tiger restless, so he was vibrant as well as smelly, with the result that the great elephant plucked nervously at his new steel picket ring. Moreover, Quorn neglected him, and an elephant is jealous as well as nervous. Restlessness and a sense of impending trouble spread all through the elephant compound, so that the mahouts were kept busy cajoling and commanding.

Quorn, with only twelve days left in which to make a plan to outwit priests who think in terms of centuries, had a chair in front of the tiger's cage in the shed, and was trying to think.

"Dammit, a man can't dig without trying," he reflected, "but thought seems different. The more I try to think, the less thought comes!"

The tiger paced up and down behind the bars, rising on his hind legs as high as he could reach at each end before he turned. Quorn had watered him and fed him good fresh meat, but when he had gone up close to the bars afterward he had had to jump back to avoid the swift, out reaching claws. The sight of the snarling fangs had nearly paralyzed him.

"Tame!" he muttered.

According to Quorn's idea the tiger should be sleepy and contented after that good meal, but there seemed to be something wrong with the calculation. He pushed the chair away and began to pace up and down with his hands behind him; and because he was trying to think of one thing, and one thing only, every conceivable thought occurred to him except the one he wanted. He was like a drowning man, reviewing all his past life, only that it took much longer.

It was possibly an hour before he realized that he was pacing one way and the tiger the other, each turning when the other turned and each making exactly the same pause before resuming the patrol. But when he had become conscious of what was happening he kept it up, until it dawned on him that the tiger seemed to like it.

He ventured slightly closer to the cage. The tiger took no notice, so presently Quorn walked up and down so close to the bars that the great claws could have reached him through them easily. But the tiger kept on pacing up and down until Quorn grew weary of it and turned away at last. Then the tiger ceased and lay down, watching him.

"Seems what you want, you sucker, is entertainment," said Quorn, and scratched his forehead.

He went out to see how Asoka was behaving and spent a long time soothing and calming the enormous beast. The sound and smell of tiger stirred and alarmed every nerve in Asoka's being, so after a while Quorn moved him to another picket beneath a *neem* tree more than a hundred yards away on the far side of the compound, where he soon settled down to dusting himself and behaving reasonably.

"I think you've given me a thought," said Quorn, "you big old bag of notions. Me, I ain't no ornithologist. I don't know a tiger from dynamite, but—"

He did not dare to try to hook that

thought yet. It was, so to speak, nibbling. He studied Asoka's forefeet for a while.

"They could crush a few eggs. They sure would make some omelette," he muttered. "Mebbe you could kill a tiger if he'd stand still. Mebbe."

Then he went back to the tiger, which appeared to have been sleeping. But the moment he entered the shed the tiger got to its feet and, appearing to recognize him, resumed its pacing up and down. It stopped at the end of half a dozen turns.

"WHAT'S worrying you now?" Quorn wondered. "If you'd only eat sugar, same as elephants, I'd be on the soft side of you in no time."

Hands behind him, in a brown study, he began to pace the floor. Before he had made one turn up and down the tiger was doing the same thing. He stopped when Quorn stopped. He resumed when Quorn resumed.

"Seems you're teaching me—not me you."

He decided he could learn, perhaps, and tried a few experiments. He found that when he rubbed against the bars the tiger did the same thing, like a great well fed cat who wanted stroking. But he did not dare yet to put his hand inside the cage. Instead, he set the chair close to the bars and sat down where the tiger could not quite reach him with its claws but could smell him and grow used to him. After a while the tiger lay down in a corner and went to sleep. Quorn took advantage of that to put the chair inside the cage. The tiger awoke, examined the chair suspiciously, decided that it smelt like Quorn, and went to sleep again.

So Quorn left the chair inside the cage and went out into the sunlight to consider. Did he dare? Had the tiger already decided to be friendly? It was evidently a tame tiger, who was used to being handled, and there was a mark on the hair of his neck, which suggested he might have worn a collar not so long ago.

One thought led to another. Quorn remembered having seen, at the back of the shed where they kept all the elephant harness, a collar that was much too big for any sort of dog he had ever heard of. He went and fetched it. It was a splendid collar with a strong brass buckle and an equally strong ring to which a chain or a lead could be fastened.

"Things are working out too slick, like 'rithmetic, for me to quarrel with 'em yet," he said to himself.

He recalled then that he had bought a second hand revolver in a pawnshop on the eve of venturing to foreign parts. He walked all the way home and fetched the thing. It was loaded and he hoped it would go off at the proper moment if required, although he doubted being able to get it out of his hip pocket very quickly.

"Nothing venture, nothing win," he told himself. "And what do you stand to lose, Ben Quorn? Only your life, and you're bound to lose that sometime. Getting chewed by a tiger won't hurt worse than being seasick."

He returned to the shed and, summoning every last ounce of courage, slipped quietly into the cage while the tiger was lying in a corner, not asleep but licking himself lazily. Quorn sat on the chair, listening to his own heart beats.

It was several minutes before the tiger strolled over to investigate. He sniffed, assured himself that the smell of the man on the chair was the smell that he knew, and began to pace up and down before the bars. Quorn sat still, simply paralyzed with fear. Two or three times the tiger came quite close to him—once actually brushing against his legs in passing. Two or three more turns up and down the cage, and then the incredible happened. The tiger came and lay at Quorn's feet, sprawling with his legs in the air, as if inviting Quorn to scratch his stomach. The tiger lay head toward him, tail toward the bars.

Courage is relative. Quorn was a man to whom an altercation with a traffic cop had been a desperate adventure until he left the United States. If he had really known how dangerous a tiger is he might have leaped out of the cage that minute,

while he had the chance. It was surely something more than courage—perhaps sheer luck and ignorance that made him rub the tiger's ears. But it was courage and nerve and almost nothing else that enabled him to slip that heavy collar around the tiger's neck and buckle it. Then fear took hold of him again. He had not the remotest notion what to do next, so he sat still. And the tiger lay still, with his great gleaming fangs within six inches of Quorn's legs, and every inch of Quorn's skin tingling every time the tiger breathed.

That strain was too great. Quorn pulled out the revolver, intending to make his escape and to shoot if he had to. The tiger rolled over and raised himself, staring at Quorn's face as if wondering whether or not to kill and eat him. And then, unable to endure fear any longer, Quorn did the craziest thing he had ever done in all his life—even crazier than throwing up a good job taxi driving in Philadelphia.

"Here, pussy!" he said, "pretty pussy! Nice puss!" And he tossed the revolver into the farther corner of the cage.

THE TIGER leaped after it. Quorn leaped for the door and slipped out, bathed in sweat. The tiger played all over the cage with the revolver, as a cat plays with a mouse, until the weapon slipped out under the horizontal bottom bar and Quorn picked it up.

"Why, durn it," he muttered. "I may be born with a gift o' training tigers." That thought brought awakening self esteem. It stirred the imagination.

Presently came Bamjee to inquire whether or not the tiger was up to specifications. By that time something new, strategic and dynamic was aroused in Quorn. He was no longer the bewildered taxi driver. He had emerged into Machiavelli's class, alert and bending every intellectual resource toward an end in view.

"He already eats out o' my hand," he answered. "And so do you unless you want your head broke. Go you to the palace and get some clothes belonging to the princess. Bring 'em here. Act secret. And remember to lie like hell to any one who asks questions. Make it snappy now."

That evening Quorn draped the chair inside the cage with dawn hued clothing that was perfumed with scent so subtle that it suggested a palace roof, a muted instrument beneath the stars, and a song sung to a sweetheart. It was strange bait for a tiger, but the tiger soon grew used to it and after a while seemed even to like it. And the following afternoon Quorn had the princess herself in the cage. The tiger recognized the scent and behaved admirably. The only difficulty was that the princess was utterly fearless and wanted to take too many chances.

"Why, look!" she exclaimed suddenly. "This is the tiger who used to pull the two wheeled cart in the durbar processions. He was so tame that he let a frightened horse kick him. And he was hurt so badly that they gave him to the Jains. Quick, give me a whip! I'll show you how he jumps over a person's head."

Quorn almost sulked. Gone was the glory of having tamed a ferocious monster! But the sight of the princess holding the brute by the collar excited his admiration for her at any rate and again set imagination working. So far he had only the ingredients for a miracle. Next he had to set the stage, and then to turn the trick. When he had persuaded her at last to come out of the cage he suggested a plan to the princess; and she was so delighted with it that her eyes became azure pools of laughter and she said that if Quorn were not verily Gunga Sahib, then the gods must have made two of them and lost the other one.

"I am only sorry I agreed to wait thirteen days," she objected.

But Quorn needed every hour of all those days to make his preparations. The princess was brave and impatient and merry, but no good whatever at details, so Quorn had to think of everything—with the aid of Bamjee, who undertook to do the necessary propaganda. Quorn's

blood was up. He was not only eager to risk everything for the Princess Sankyamuni's sake, he was blazing mad, indignant with the priests, with the rajah, and with the entire population of Narada because it was willing to let the princess run that awful risk.

"Don't you give those priests a chance to back down!" he instructed Bamjee. "They've got to take a licking, or we're out—one way or the other, and no alibi! You keep the crowd so pepped up that the priests won't dare to call it off!"

IT WAS the rajah who grew frightened as the day drew near. It occurred to him that he stood to lose whichever way the tiger jumped. Public opinion, that was now excitedly in favor of the ceremony, would undoubtedly condemn him afterward, even though the incredible should happen and the princess should come through the ordeal successfully. He would be regarded as a heartless parent; and because he was exactly that, it was the one thing that he wished not to be called. He tried to bargain with the priests, offering them all sorts of concessions if they would dig up another legend, or come out into the open with another contradictory prophecy that would serve as an excuse to cancel the proceedings.

But the priests were in no position to oblige him. What they hoped was, that the rajah would forbid the ordeal, thus forcing the princess back into seclusion and leaving the priests more influential than ever. But the rajah knew that if he should do that, not only would the priests have triumphed, which would be galling, but the crowd would blame him for the disappointment.

He consulted Quorn, while Quorn was sitting on Asoka's forefoot with mallet and chisel, trimming Asoka's toe nails.

"Can you tame that tiger, Mr. Quorn?"

"Haven't seen the crittur yet, your Highness."

"It's an enormous one and venomously savage."

"Priests won't let me see him, sir. I'd like some sort of pass that 'ud take me into the courtyard where they've got him caged."

"Do you propose to—er—er, dope him?"

"No, sir." Shade of Machiavelli! Quorn saw suddenly how to fit the last piece into the puzzle. He went on chiseling Asoka's forefoot.

"I'm afraid the priests might dope him, sir. Can't do nothing with a tiger that's been doped. He's undependable."

"You mean, then, you can manage the brute?"

"If I'm let. But I don't trust them priests. I'd like that tiger watched. I'd like leave for Bamjee and my man Moses to spell each other keeping tabs on him from outside the cage. As many priests as like can watch them. I'd like the people of Narada to know that the tiger *is* being watched so there'll be no hocus-pocus. This here is going to be a big league miracle."

"If I were sure—"

"You seen me tame this elephant," Quorn answered, getting off Asoka's forefoot. "Up you get, two tails! Give his Highness your college yell. Salute him good."

Asoka threw his trunk in air, screamed, and thumped his forefoot in the dust. The rajah spun a coin in the air.

"Heads!" he exclaimed. "Heads it is. Very well, Mr. Quorn, Bamjee and Moses shall watch the tiger and you may go in to see him as often as you please. I will arrange that with the priests."

The tiger turned out to be worse than Quorn anticipated. He was in a big cage half hidden by creepers that climbed on the masonry in a corner of the temple courtyard, close to where a flight of ancient steps led up beside a high wall toward upper levels from which the bridge led toward the farther temple—that of Siva. This being the temple of Kali, the Bride of Siva, all the carvings were of skulls and snakes and other dreadful symbols of the universal principle of death.

But there was nothing there more dreadful than the brute that lurked be-

hind those bars. Some animals are maniacs. When Quorn approached the tiger sprang and tried to tear the bars apart, wrenching at them with teeth and claws—a mad, magnificent striped devil that would kill for the love of killing. He was a pet well chosen for the Goddess of Destruction.

THE PRIESTS watched Quorn to make sure that he threw no poisoned or drugged meat between the bars. They were amused when shown the rajah's order permitting Bamjee and Moses to keep watch in turns lest the tiger should be interfered with. One of the priests, too proud to speak to Quorn except through an interpreter, said:

"Doubtless your gods have told you how to tame that animal, as undoubtedly they told you how to tame the elephant. We will all be here to see you do it."

But the sarcasm escaped Quorn. He was far too interested in the cage.

There were two doors—one at the side, beneath an arch, made fast with a padlock bigger than a man's fist, and the other was in front. Ten of the bars formed part of it, and it was fastened with a bolt that led into the masonry above. There was a hole in the bolt through which a wooden peg passed. If the peg was pulled out, the bolt would drop by its own weight and the barred door would fall forward. That peg, however, was high out of reach.

"But ain't that like a priest to fasten one door with a padlock and the other with a peg!" Quorn muttered.

"This door, this other one under the arch, is that through which the princess must enter to bring the tiger forth," a priest explained. "We have the key. We will unlock it for her." Quorn nodded.

Outside in the street, when he was sure that no one overheard, he instructed Bamjee:

"Get some sewing machine oil and a spool of good stout cobbler's thread. First chance you get, oil the hinges o' that front door of the cage, and mind you, oil 'em proper, but don't let anybody see you."

That night Quorn returned to the temple with a peg in his pocket. He pretended he wished to make sure that Bamjee was awake, but he took the spool of thread from Bamjee, tested its strength, and tied one end of it firmly to the peg. Then he walked up close to the cage. The tiger snarled and leaped against the bars. Quorn studied the bars and insisted that the peg at the top that fastened them, was loose. It was dark. Nobody could really see. After a lot of argument a priest agreed to bring a ladder and to let Quorn examine the peg. Quorn carefully replaced it with the other. On his way down he concealed the thread among the creepers, tucking away the spool into a crack in the masonry behind some leaves, where it could easily be reached by anybody standing on the ground. And whoever should pull that would pull out the peg, which would let the bars fall and release the tiger.

On the following day, in the elephant lines, he astonished the mahouts by drilling Bamjee in the art of throwing a certain weight a certain distance in the air.

"Remember now," he said, "I ain't no Babe Ruth and I'll be sitting on an earthquake. So take your time and aim careful. Try to hit me on the nose and make sure the bouquet don't hold any bricks."

And then, one moonlight night, rehearsal at the back of the elephant lines with the aid of four palace servants whom Quorn and Bamjee had decided they could trust—a coachman and three footmen. The princess was so excited and full of laughter that it was difficult to keep her mind on anything. Quorn had to speak to her almost sternly before he felt sure she knew her part.

"If we slip up, miss, we're done for. We've got to do this letter perfect. Now remember, you've a right to have ladies with you, and they've a right not to be seen in public, so in case anybody asks you, the carriage what comes behind you has some six, seven, eight o' your ladies in it. Nobody'll know you're prevaricating

if only our tiger keeps quiet, and we'll have to trust to luck for that—luck and a fair to middling solid meal. There'll be two men up behind, and one up beside the driver, to make sure nobody peeks through the shutters. That part's up to you. You've got to send word to the priests that you're coming with a carriage full of *purdah* ladies; and if the priests raise any kick about it we'll have Bamjee do some propaganding so's the crowd'll shame 'em into letting the carriage go through the temple gate behind us. Now are you sure you've got that? Good. Then come on. Let me see you lead this tame pussy of ours into that carriage and feed him some scraps in there. Then lead him back into his cage and feed him a fine big belly full o' fresh meat what'll make him remember he had it. We've got to get him used to the idea that a carriage ride means something good now and lots more later on."

To lead even a tame tiger in the dark is no sinecure. It is very different from leading the same animal in daylight. But a man went ahead, trailing a piece of meat along the ground. Quorn had an extra, loose line passed through the ring in the tiger's collar. Two men kept near with a net in case of accident. And all went well.

"The gods are with us," said the princess.

"Give the gods a back seat," Quorn retorted. "One more rehearsal tomorrow night, then me and you'll make a big league miracle or bust! It's lucky for us that the sun will be shining in his eyes and make this striped puss blind and lazy. That way, when you lead him along the parapet you'll be able to move reasonable slow and dignified."

THERE was no law against crossing that ancient bridge. It was not closed, but deserted because men were superstitious. Quorn sent Moses with a piece of meat to be drawn at the end of a string along the full length of the yard wide parapet and leave its stench above the heads of the gods and goddesses on whose shoulders the doves cooed all day long. And Asoka spent the last night at his own picket, chained by both hind feet instead of only one, fidgeting and needing to be coaxed at intervals because he could smell and hear tiger just beyond the compound wall. All through the quiet night he plucked at the bright steel ankle rings.

At last the great day dawned and all Narada kept gay holiday. The streets were thronged from early morning with crowds on whose lips were the names of Gunga Sahib and the Princess Sankyamuni. There was no doubt. Nobody believed that such an ancient, thoroughly authenticated prophecy would not come true. Had not they all not long ago seen the Gunga Sahib tame the furious Asoka and bring back the Princess Sankyamuni, radiantly lovely, riding on him through the city streets?

They had seen it with their own eyes. So indubitably she would tame the tiger now in Kali's temple, and would lead him across the bridge as prophesied—especially, of course, because it was no secret that the Gunga Sahib was to take her to the temple on that self same elephant Asoka, who had had part in the former miracle. The thing was foredestined.

There was nothing to do but wait, and watch, and be hot and excited, and lose the children in the crowd, and be good tempered and merry and behold how true the legends were.

"*Bande* Sankyamuni! *Bande* Gunga Sahib!"

The sweetmeat sellers and the sticky pink lemonade sellers did a roaring business. And the rajah, in the palace garden, chewed his finger nails, until he decided at last that the only sensible course for him was to take to his bed and pretend to be ill, so that nobody might blame him for whatever happened.

Asoka's nerves were so upset by the smell of tiger near his picket that Quorn had a hard time to get him polished up and harnessed with the silver plated howdah.

But it was accomplished at last, and then Quorn made a caste mark on his own forehead with the aid of a carmine lip stick borrowed from the princess. He put on a turban that Bamjee had given him, and wore a long, white cotton Indian shirt. He was a modest man and not even deadly danger could induce him to abandon trousers, so he looked like a medley of East and West when he mounted Asoka's neck and stuck his knees under the enormous ears, with a chief mahout's jeweled *ankus* in his hand.

But no native of Narada could possibly have mistaken him for anybody other than the Gunga Sahib, whose features, a thousand years ago, were carved in limestone on the end wall of the market place. Undoubtedly, the gods had sent him back into the world to help to fulfill the ancient prophecies.

A very large shuttered carriage, drawn by four horses that had been broken to elephant and every other kind of animal that one may meet in Indian streets, with two men on the driver's seat and two fierce looking, whiskered attendants standing on the little platform at the rear, followed Asoka into the palace grounds, where a screen was drawn, so that none might see the ladies as they stepped into the carriage. But numbers of impudent rascals, hidden amid the shrubbery, beheld the princess come forth from the palace, radiant and unveiled, to climb into the howdah by a ladder. And there were several of those who said afterward that no ladies followed her and none got into the carriage. Nevertheless, they said they heard strange noises coming through the shutters—noises that ceased unaccountably when somebody threw in what appeared to be meat.

But why should any one believe such nonsense? Did the crowd not see the shuttered carriage, with their own eyes, following Asoka through the streets? Everybody knew that a shuttered carriage is intended to hold *purdah* ladies. And if there were no ladies, why the fierce looking attendants scowling to the crowd to keep its distance?

ASOKA behaved magnificently in spite of that tiger smell that had so upset him. He was always manner perfect when he bore that silver howdah and had Quorn's knees under his ears. He was a beast of monumental dignity, who could sense a dramatic moment and live up to it, so the procession through the colorful, tree lined streets was solemn and as satisfying as even Narada, almost sated with splendid processions, could have wished. They had to pass through the midst of the enormous throng that packed the Pul-ke-nichi and swarmed on roofs and walls, whence they could see the parapet of the ancient bridge. It was along that parapet that legend said a princess had once led a tiger. Everybody, except the temple priests, implicitly believed that miracle was now about to be repeated. Had the priests not said it should be? And here was the Princess Sankyamuni, unveiled, lovelier than legend, riding on the very maharajah of all elephants, in a silver howdah, behind the Gunga Sahib with the he-goat's eyes. Anybody who might think there was not going to be a miracle was absolutely crazy.

The crowd roared encouragement until the limestone walls re-echoed and the narrow Pul-ke-nichi became a river of splendid sound. But Asoka began rumbling ominously. He smelt tiger again. As they made the turn into the temple courtyard gateway there were some who noticed that Asoka was beginning to be almost out of hand. There might have been a panic if the great wooden gate had not opened so swiftly, and closed again so swiftly behind the four horsed, shuttered carriage. There was silence then—an eager, breathless silence of anticipation as the entire crowd stared into the sun toward the parapet.

Asoka swung into the temple courtyard at a great pace, rumbling and swaying his trunk from side to side so ominously that a crowd of priests made way for him, forgetting dignity and taking refuge behind columns. There was almost a stampede. Even the chief priest had to step aside.

He had taken his stand in full regalia before the tiger's cage, expecting to see the princess swoon at the sight of the dreadful brute. As a piece of exquisite sarcasm he had ordered a strip of carpet laid on the flight of stone steps, up which the princess was to lead the tiger in order to reach the bridge. But he was all ready with scornful words, at the first sign of her shrinking to order her home again and into life long *purdah*.

He had a speech ready, too, for the crowd outside, that should send them home with something else than miracles on which to meditate.

Asoka upset calculations by behaving like a bull just loosed in the arena, turning this way and that—for a victim. He could not endure that smell of tiger. It was scandalous. It aroused every fighting nerve in the whole five tons of him. And as he approached the cage the tiger leaped up at the iron bars, snarling with all the passionate fear and hatred that a tiger feels for an elephant. Asoka screamed. He trembled like a boiler before it explodes. But he paused for one second with his trunk held rigid and a forefoot raised in air, because he heard Quorn's quiet voice. And in that second Bamjee, crouching in the shadow of an arch, threw a bouquet of flowers, which Quorn caught. Nobody saw the dark, thin, strong thread tied to it. Quorn passed the flowers to the princess, jerked at the thread, and the peg dropped out that held the bolt that fastened the front of the tiger's cage. Ten bars fell forward with a crash. And like a flash of lightning out leaped the tiger, loose among priests in the temple courtyard.

There was pandemonium. Asoka thought he knew now what Quorn's voice had meant. He screamed again. The four horses went crazy and had to be loosed to prevent them from dragging the carriage all over the courtyard and upsetting it. A resourceful footman cut the traces. The horses galloped among the priests and scattered them. Asoka's little angry eyes blazed red and there began such a tiger hunt as only monkeys see in jungles when tiger has challenged elephant and there is a war to the death between them. Only now a silver howdah instead of a hunting saddle swayed and shook on Asoka's back—the fleeing animals were terror stricken priests—the trees were courtyard columns—and there was a quiet voiced man directing the terrific battle.

"Take your time, you sucker, or you'll scrape us off under the archway! Easy now, easy! What's your bean for? Use it! You've got to corner him first—you can't crush all out doors! You ain't no polo pony—save yourself a bit. There—now you've got him! Give her the gas now! Fire when you're ready, Gridley!"

BOTH sides fired together. The tiger had taken refuge down a short arched passageway that was closed by a door at the farther end. Asoka charged into the passage. The tiger leaped at the flailing trunk, that just escaped his claws, and landed on the broad head, snarling, his fangs gleaming within two feet of Quorn's face, his baleful eyes blazing in gloom as he struggled for foothold. The hollow arch rang with the battle, and then with thunder, as Asoka crashed into the great teak door at the end of the passage and crushed the tiger, shook him off—trampled—trod him into crimson pulp.

"There—there's a bully boy—king of elephants," said Quorn, examining the enormous head to see what damage the tiger's claws had done.

It was nothing much—nothing that could not be healed with washing, and lint and tape. He turned to the princess.

"Now, miss, do your stuff and make it snappy. Slide down by his tail while I keep him headed this way. He'll go crazy again—he'll spoil everything if he sees that other tiger."

He encouraged Asoka to knead his victim's carcass into red mash while the princess threw down over his rump a rope that had been tied fast to the howdah. With the aid of that and his tail, she reached the paving stones. She ran then

—ran to the shuttered carriage, and while the four men held the horses she led out a big, sleek, sleepy tiger who had only had half his dinner and knew he would get the other half if he walked a little way beside this person with the vague, delicious scent on her gauzy garments. She had fed him twice thus, why not now, a third time?

One priest lost a lawn shirt, because Quorn tore it off him to dip in water and staunch Asoka's scratches, praising his charge the while and calling him pearl of elephants. Some of the priests had taken refuge in the chambers that gave on the cloistered courtyard. The others, including the chief priest, saw the princess lead her tiger up the ancient stairway, and saw Bamjee follow at a good safe distance, carrying a sack containing meat. And presently, from outside, from the street and from the roofs and walls, they heard the thunder of a crowd's voice welcoming a miracle and praising Mother Nature because the ancient tales were true. The crowd made such a noise as should have brought the sky down.

Those priests of Kali knew the meaning of defeat. They had presence of mind. They might still prevent disaster to themselves by snatching unmerited prestige. They urged their chief priest to ascend the stairs to the bridge, mount the parapet and give the multitude his blessing. Perhaps he was grateful that his temple tiger had not killed him and a few of his attendants. At any rate, he blessed the people beautifully; and that, of course, was accepted as official recognition of the miracle.

If anyone should tell the people ever any more, amen, that there are no such things as miracles they would stone him with stones from the dirtiest part of the street, and serve him right, the infidel.

Quorn calmed Asoka, patched him, hid the patches under an embroidered cloth that he took from a priest, and that made Asoka's ponderous head look more dignified than ever. Then he helped catch the terrified horses and sent the empty shuttered carriage home by quiet by-streets; after which he mounted Asoka again and rode him down the crowded Pul-ke-nichi to the courtyard entrance of the farther temple, receiving on his way such an ovation as surely even Akbar never had.

The crowd brought out bands and banners. And when the princess came forth presently, surrounded by Siva's priests, who pretended they were glad to have received the tiger and to have seen a prophecy fulfilled, and by Bamjee, who was smiling all over his face and rubbing his hands surreptitiously to get the smell of meat off them, there was such a glorious uproar as would have graced a baseball game.

Asoka knelt. The princess, now for evermore unveiled and rapturously lovely, stepped into the howdah. Bamjee borrowed a horse and made haste to the palace to inform the rajah what had happened. The bands struck up, the streets reverberated to the din of jubilee, and a glorious procession flowed all through the city until it reached the palace gate, where the rajah, roused out of his bed, had to stand surrounded by his courtiers and greet with a royal smile his only daughter, heiress to his throne, who was henceforth free to choose a husband for herself, and ever to powder her nose in public if she wished.

THE RAJAH knew how to be gracious when there was no way out of it. He gave Asoka two whole pounds of sugar. And when Quorn got home that night to eat the goat chops prepared by Moses, he found a box of the rajah's fifty cent Perfectos waiting for him. He bit off the end of one and lit it. He gave one to Moses. Then he looked at himself in the mirror and thought of the taxicab he used to drive. He grinned. He nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it was a big league miracle all right."

WALT COBURN

gives us a moving little story that swings a dramatic arc from the Old West to the battlefields of France

A NOTCHED GUN

SAM GRAYBULL was a killer. He proved it now as he backed slowly out of the Valley Bank with a smoking Colt in one hand and a gunnysack full of currency in the other. The teller had made a move for the automatic below the money counter. Sam Graybull's bullet had caught the unfortunate man between the eyes.

The cashier, his movements sluggish from stark fear, made a break for the side door and was shot in the back.

"You'll be next," he told the young lady stenographer, "if you let out one yap."

The blizzard outside muffled the sound of the shots. There was no one abroad in the little storm swept cow town to block San Graybull's departure. He mounted the horse that stood humped in the snow. In five minutes he was lost in the storm, made thicker by the shadows of dusk. He left no telltale sign. Because the country between Milk River and the Bad Lands was as familiar as a child's back yard, he had no fear of capture. He tied the sackful of money to his saddle and fashioned a cigaret with thick, blunt fingers that were steady.

"That damn' bank dude's mouth flopped open shore comical." The rattle of Sam Graybull's laugh was blurred by the wind.

No fear of pursuit marred the killer's flight. He knew the ways of sheriff's posses. They would hole up at the first ranch. That is why he had held off till the storm broke, then rode into town and stuck up the bank. A one man job. Cunningly planned, cold bloodedly executed. The lives he had taken were but tally notches on his gun, no more. He would boast about it when he got drunk.

"That other'n piled up like a beef."

The storm swirled and moaned. The horse drifted with the wind, headed south for the Bad Lands. A man could hole up there and get plenty drunk. Grub in the cabin. Wood enough for a month. Hay a-plenty. A keg of moonshine licker. When a man got hard up for company, there was Pete Peralta and his wife across the river. Pete was a damn' fool but he knowed how to keep his mouth shut. Pete was all right. Just didn't have the guts to go out and take chances, that was all. Mebbe if it wasn't fer the missus, Pete might swap a hayfork fer a gun and pick up some easy money. Pete's missus was just a young thing. Purty enough, so far as looks went. Kinda quiet. Scairt, like as not, because she wa'n't used to men that had guts. But she had sense. Close mouthed like most 'breed women. No damn' sheriff'd ever git anything outa Rose Peralta.

IT WAS getting dark now. Black as a hat. Sam Graybull shrank into his buffalo coat and let his horse drift along. He rode good horses. Whenever Sam Graybull stole a horse he picked a good one. It was nearly a hundred miles into the Larb Hills where they dropped in timbered ridges to meet the Missouri River. To travel all night in a blizzard was only part of a man's job. The same as killing those two bank dudes. And by evening tomorrow he would be at his cabin in the Bad Lands.

"That keg'll look good."

Sam Graybull liked whisky. He liked whisky like most men like women. Liked the color of it in a glass. Liked the gurgle of the stuff as it spilled out of a jug into a tin cup. Talk about music. The burn of it when a man tilted a jug and drank it thataway. God, fer a drink right now.

But Sam Graybull dared not drink till he got home. Tried it onct. Fell off a horse and froze both feet sleepin' in the snow. Peter Peralta was horse huntin' and found him. Pete's missus taken care of him. Pete wasn't much of a hand to drink. A few shots and Pete had a-plenty. Just enough to make that fiddle talk good. "The Red River Jig" and "Hell Among the Yearling's" and "Cross Eyed Moses." 'Breed tunes.

Sam hadn't seen Pete and his missus since early last spring. They were the only friends he claimed. A man on the dodge can't have many friends. Not when there's a big bounty on his scalp. That's the way most of the boys got theirs. Trustin' somebody. Hell, them fool posses never got nowhere. Milled around. And when they followed Sam Graybull they kept bunched. Damn' right they did.

Sam had been in Wyoming all summer. Gamblin' some amongst the sheep shearers. Gettin' drunk and eatin' good. Nobody the wiser. Who'd look around sheep camps fer a cow hand? Then he'd up and shot that Mexican shearer and had to drift back into Montana again. Too quick on the trigger.

Sam's rattling laugh broke forth again. He took out his .45 and with the nail file blade of his jacknife, he made two fresh notches on the gun's bone handle. That was the Indian in him. Sam was about a quarter breed Sioux. He was proud of those notches. Six, all told, counting the two bank dudes. Not bad fer a man thirty-one. He'd tell Pete and his missus. Pete'd grin kinda silly. The missus'd just sit and shiver like she was took with a chill. Scairt of a man that had guts. A man that was quick on the trigger.

INTO the black maw of the cañons and draws. Snow piling in till a man felt smothered. Black as a hat. Cold. Give a dollar fer a drink. Hell, give five dollars. Ten. There was money

a-plenty in that sack. Whisky money.

Topping out on a long ridge. Into a dawn that was the color of dirty slate. A wind that bit plumb into a man's innards. Didn't dast drop into a ranch or even a sheep camp fer grub. There'd be no fool sign fer a posse to pick up. Nobody but Pete knew of that little log cabin tucked away in a pocket of the Bad Lands. Pines and brush and rocks. Grub cached. Shoot a black-tail buck or a yearlin'. What's two days without grub? Make a man eat good when he got it. Whisky and meat. Good whisky and fat meat. Half way home now. Safe as dog in a hole.

Keep to the coulees, just under the rim of the ridges. No use skylinin' a man's self. All day. Horse gittin' laig weary. Stumbled into a badger hole. No harm done. Wind that shriveled a man's heart. Wind that cut the hide on a man's face. Feet like ice cakes. Like the blood was dried up. God, but that whisky'd send it chargin' through a man's veins, though. Fill a jug and go acrost to Pete Peralta's. A man needed talk when he'd bin alone so long. Pete'd drag out the fiddle. "Red River Jig." "Hell among the Yearlin's." "Blue Bottles."

He pulled into his hidden cañon that afternoon. A frost seared, fur clad figure, red eyed from the wind and loss of sleep. A lone figure in a vast white world. Cold, hungry, craving whisky as a man on a parched desert craves water. With a fortune tied in a gunnysack. Two fresh notches on the bone handle of a short barreled Colt .45. A laugh rattling in his throat.

Hay in the barn. Pete had put up that hay. The spring above the cabin was warm. It never froze. Had an iron taste to it.

Sam Graybull watered and fed his gaunt horse. While no law of God or man had weight with the killer, he never violated that creed of the range that commands its men to care for a horse that has carried a man. After that he may look to his own comfort.

Sam Graybull found the whisky keg buried under the hay. He found a tin cup, and with a corner of his fur coat he wiped some of the dust from inside it. Then he squatted there by the keg and drank a cup of whisky as if the stuff were water. He sat there for better than half an hour. Drinking until the ache thawed from his bones and the hunger pains left his empty stomach. Now and then he laughed. The horse would give a start and look around, ears erect. Sam Graybull's laugh was unlike the laughter of any other man because there was no humor in it. More like a death rattle.

He was steady enough on his feet when he got up and went to the cabin. As steady as a man can be when he has been frozen into the saddle for a night and a day, and when he is bundled in fur coat and chaps and four buckle overshoes.

"Fill a jug and go visit Pete Peralta. To hell with cookin'. Pete's missus'll sling up some grub." His cracked, frost blackened lips split in a grin as he saw smoke coming from the Peralta cabin, across the river among the skeleton cottonwoods.

He found a jug and filled it. Then he kicked off his chaps and located a pair of snowshoes. It was as easy goin' afoot as it was a-horseback. He slung the jug about his shoulder with a bit of rope. Then he took his carbine and fitted it into a worn buckskin sheath.

"Whisky. Ca'tridges. All set." Then he remembered the money in the gunnysack. 'Whisky's takin' holt." He hid the money in the hay. Then, shuffling along on his webs, he crossed the river to Pete Peralta's place.

II

EVEN before he rapped on the door, Sam Graybull sensed that something was wrong at the home of Pete Peralta. Horses in the hay corral, nibbling from the snow capped stack. Gate down. No tracks around. Cattle, gaunt flanked and hollow eyed, bawling for water in the lower pasture. Woodpile buried in the snow. Yet there was smoke

coming from the chimney. A light inside, against the coming dusk.

"Come in!" Was that the voice of Pete Peralta? Sam could not see through the window. Frost had made the panes opaque.

Cautiously Sam Graybull opened the door. His jug and carbine laid aside, he held his Colt in his hand, the hammer thumbed back. He kicked the door open.

For a moment Sam Graybull stood there, half crouched, ready. Then he straightened. The gun hammer lowered gently and the weapon went back into its holster.

For propped up on a bunk beside the stove, one leg in rude splints, sat Pete Peralta. A hollow eyed, gaunt cheeked, unshaven Pete.

"Sam! Sam Graybull!" His voice was like the hoarse call of a crow. But there was a prayer in its welcome, as he voiced the name of the killer.

From the bedroom beyond came a broken, moaning sob. A woman's sob. A woman half delirious with pain.

"Horse fell and busted my leg . . . About a week ago . . . Rose took care of me until she had to quit . . . She's goin' to have a baby—and no doctor inside a hundred miles. I reckon she'll die."

It took Sam Graybull some seconds to comprehend fully. A pint or more of raw whisky on an empty stomach does not make for quiet thinking. The fact that he could retain even a semblance of his faculties proved the toughness of the killer.

"Doctor, eh?" Sam Graybull pushed back his muskrat cap and ran blunt fingers through his shock of coarse black hair. "Doctor? Yeah, you sure need one, don't you, Pete?"

"Not me, Sam. Her. She's out of her head, kinda."

"Dyin', Pete?"

"She will, I reckon. There has to be a doctor when a baby comes."

Sam Graybull passed his hand across his eyes. He know nothing of childbirth. There had never been room in his killer's heart for sympathy for man or woman. Life and the losing of life meant but little to him. He nodded, black brows knit in a thoughtful scowl. Then he stepped outside and brought in the jug.

He poured three drinks into tin cups.

"Do us all good, Pete. Then we'll kinda figger this thing out." He took one of the cups and went into the next room.

"Howdy, Rose. Git outside o' this. Nothin' like it to kill pain."

Dimly, through eyes that were mere slits of red, he saw the white face of the girl. White as the pillow against the mass of black hair. He lifted her head and held the cup against the lips that seemed drained of blood.

"The pain—the pain . . ."

"Hell, ain't it? But that drink'll do you good."

He went back into the other room and handed Pete his cup.

"Here's luck, Pete. Down 'er. More where that come from."

Sam gulped down his drink without a grimace. His brain seemed to be clearing.

"Where do you keep your pencil and paper, Pete?"

"That shelf. God, Sam, if we could only do somethin' to help her."

"Keep your shirt on." Sam found the writing pad and pencil. He handed them to the crippled man.

"Write a note to the doctor, Pete. Tell it scary." Sam pulled on his cap again. "I'll be ready by the time you git it wrote."

"Where you goin', Sam?"

"Out to saddle up the best horse you got. I'm goin' fer the doctor. I'll stop by the nearest ranch and have 'em send over somebody to ride herd on you." The door banged shut behind him.

Sam caught Pete's best horse. When he had saddled the animal, he came back inside.

"Got that note finished?"

"Yes. But you can't make it into town, Sam."

"The hell I can't. The storm's quit. I know the road, and I ain't so drunk but what I kin ride. Lemme have that pencil."

He scrawled something at the foot of the note. Then he folded the paper and put it into his pocket.

"Hang and rattle, Pete, till the doc gits here." He poured some of the whisky into an empty vinegar bottle and put the corked bottle into his overcoat. Then he filled the two cups.

"Here's how, Pete. If the kid looks like you, I shore feel sorry fer the critter."

Sam tossed down his drink and before Pete Peralta could say a word, he was gone.

III

IT WAS almighty hard luck, the way things had turned out for a man. When the only friend a man had was laid up with a busted laig and a sick wife. No "Red River Jig". No fire to set by. No Pete to talk to and tell how comical that bank dude looked when he dropped. No warm grub. Only that bottle. Better drop past the cabin and fill a jug. When a man ain't slept ner et he'd orter have a jug along to keep him alive.

He stopped at his cabin long enough to fill the jug. Then he pulled out. He rode into a Long X line camp. A slit eyed, frost blackened man who staggered a little when he walked. The two cowpunchers stared hard at him.

"Peter Peralta's in bad shape. Broke a laig. His missus is dyin'. I'm ridin' fer a doctor. One o' you boys git over there and look after things."

He wolfed some meat and beans and gave them a shot out of his jug. One of the cowpunchers was getting ready for the trip to Pete's. Sam Graybull climbed back into the saddle and rode on.

The storm had quit. The stars glittered like white sparks against the clear sky. The moon pushed up over the ragged ridges. Sam Graybull swayed a little as he rode, half asleep, half awake, back along the trail to town.

He took some tobacco and rubbed it into his eyes to sting them open. Now and then he took a drink from the jug. Not as big a drink as he wanted. Just enough to keep a man alive. That grub made a man sleepy. A paunch full of meat always made a man sleepy. Almighty hard luck that a man couldn't git off and lay down. For five minutes. Yeah. Five hours. Be froze stiff as a stick. Hadn't he froze his feet thataway? Wouldn't he a-died there only Pete come by? Hell, he was payin' Pete back right now. A man paid his debts thataway. Took guts, too. But when a man's got one friend on earth, he'd be a hell of a kind of man not to lend a hand. It took guts. Somethin' Pete didn't have. Pete was a chicken hearted cuss. With his wife and his fiddle. Never taken a chance. Never would get nowhere. Like a cow pasture. A muley cow. Well, no man had ever sawed Sam Graybull's horns. No fence made ever held him. No jail, neither. Never bin ketched. Them as tried it had some hard luck. Have a drink. Damn that cork. A man's hands stiff and numb. There she comes. Good whisky. Thawed a man's belly. Fightin' whisky.

Sam Graybull's laugh grated on the silence of the winter night. There'd be fightin' a-plenty if a man run into that fool posse. Sam took a beaded buckskin pouch and put into it the note to the doctor. Then he fastened the pouch around his neck outside his coat. He moved with a dogged, sluggish precision. Like a machine that needs oil. He lost one of his mittens. The right mitten. He put the other mitten on his right hand, leaving the left one bare. Sam Graybull's right hand was his gun hand.

Out of the hills and onto the main road to town. Daylight now. Sleepy. Dozing in the saddle. Ridin' that horse like he owned him. Payin' off the only debt he owed to his only friend.

Yonder was Beaver Crick. Old gray wolf a-comin' outa the bare willers. With a belly full of meat, headin' fer a safe place to sleep it off. Sam never killed a wolf. Hell, he was a wolf, hisself. A he-wolf. A killer. No rabbit, like Pete Peralta. Pete, whinin' over a busted laig. What'd he do if he had a .30-.40 slug

in him and had to gouge it out with a jacknife? Sam Graybull had done that.

What's a-comin' yonder? Horseback-ers. A dozen er more. Posse men. Time fer a drink. A big'n this time. No nibble. Bin holdin' off. Waitin'.

"Here's lookin' at you boys!" Sam Graybull's hoarse voice carried a note of triumph. "Here's lookin' at you acrost gun sights!" And he left the fiery stuff gurgle down his throat.

A rifle bullet whined past Sam Graybull's head. He taunted the marksman with a yell of derision and, tossing aside the jug, jerked his carbine and rode at a run straight for the men.

A hail of bullets met his rush. Sam Graybull's horse somersaulted, shot between the eyes. Sam tried to kick his feet from the stirrups. Too late. Horse and man crashed together. A dull pain shot through the killer's leg. That leg was pinned under the dead weight of the horse. Bullets spatted and droned. Sam Graybull emptied his carbine. Two of the posse felt the searing sting of the outlaw's bullets. Sam pulled his six-gun —the .45 that had taken deadly toll of human life. His thumb fanned the hammer.

"Come an' git it! Come on, you red necks!"

Black lips bared from tobacco stained teeth. Slit eyes swollen almost shut. It took guts.

Something white hot stabbed Sam Graybull's chest. He hardly felt it. Above the flat spat of rifles in the dawn, sounded the mirthless laugh of Sam Graybull. A laugh that sounded like the death rattle. Tumbing the hammer of an empty gun. Then the weary head dropped back into the snow. Sam Graybull, killer, was dead.

The last of the whisky gurgled out of the uncorked jug into the trail.

"HE MUST have got drunk, blind drunk, and lost his way."

"The sheriff pulled the dead outlaw clear of the horse. Grimly triumphant, the grizzled old officer examined the body of the killer. Then he opened the pouch and found the note.

As he read it, there in the sunrise of that winter morning, the warm glow of victory chilled. He turned to a man who carried a small black bag instead of a gun.

"This is fer you, Doc. You're wanted down on the river." He handed over the note. Then he turned to his men.

"Handle Sam easy, boys. He come back a-purpose, to do the only decent thing he ever done in his life. Pete Peralta's wife is about to have a baby. Sam Graybull come to fetch Doc. Handle 'im easy."

The sheriff and Doc Steele rode along the trail together. Doc read aloud the postscript to Pete Peralta's note.

> "The bank money is in a sack under the hay at my cabin. What bounty there is on my hide goes to Pete Peralta. If the kid's a boy, name him Graybull. Use the bounty money to educate him. So long"
>
> —SAM GRAYBULL.

And so it was that Doc Steele brought into the world a boy named Graybull Peralta. Some of the A.E.F. will remember him as Captain Graybull Peralta, the fighting chaplain of the —th Division, made up of men from the cow country. He was killed in action in the Argonne. In the pocket of his blouse was a bullet drilled, blood soaked Bible. In his hand was a bone handled six-gun with six notches filed on its age yellowed handle.

Major Steele, who found him, gently removed the empty gun from the dead captain's hand. He looked with memory misted eyes at the face of the fighting parson. The bared lips, the swollen, slitted eyes.

"Handle him gently, men," he told the stretcher bearers. "Gently, as we handled his father twenty years ago. May the son of Sam Graybull find fat meat in the Shadow Hills!"

And they were too busy, those stretcher bearers, to wonder at the queer words of the white haired surgeon.

BOATSWAIN

By Bill Adams

OH, IT'S furling of the topsails is a job for men
When the wild Horn winds do waken;
You may gather up the canvas but you'll lose it all again,
From your fingers by the white squall taken.

(*The boatswain speaking*)
"Are ye ready?—Yo, heave, ho!
Never mind the lightning nor the whirling snow!
There ye be, my bullies! Hold it tight beneath your breast
An' never mind the achin' of your arms an' chest.
'Tis just the mizzentops'l. There's the fore and main.
When we get down from the mizzen we'll go aloft again!"

Aye, it's furling of the topsails is a job, I said,
And if you're not good sailormen you're wishing you were dead!

(*The boatswain speaking.*)
"Yes, sir! Aye, aye, sir! The mizzentops'l's furled.
What's the matter Billy Dick? What's makin' ye look sick?
A sailor's job's the miserablest in all the bloody world?
Is your knuckles torn an' red? Are ye wishin' ye was dead?

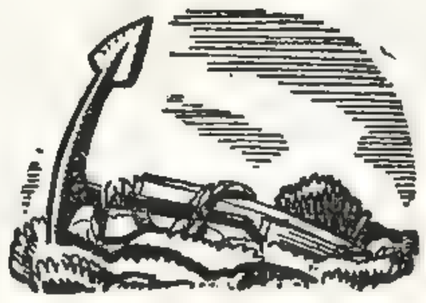
Get aloft upon the foremast's what the chief mate said!
We'll all see Frisco some day if it's lucky that we are,
An' we'll go to Johnnie Brown's place an' we'll line along the bar.
Up aloft! Up aloft! Up aloft, my sons, again,
When we've furled the big foretops'l, then we'll wrestle with the main!"

Oh, the snow it whirls and the lightning flares
And the skipper aloft to his boatswain stares,
With his big hands bloody and his beard all rime,
He's a small boy playing in the summer time.

The men are weary and weak and wan,
And the chief mate's strength is well nigh gone,
And nobody knows that the boatswain's shirt
Hides three cracked ribs, nor how they hurt;
And nobody knows that the red blood gushed
For he swallowed it ere from his lips it rushed.
And the topsails are furled, and the ship rides well
Though a wind from the Pole it blows like hell.

The boatswain to his bunk he went, and he laid him down to rest,
And never he recked that his strength was spent nor heeded his tortured breast.
For it's broken ribs and the taste of blood are part of a boatswain's way,
And he fell asleep, and he smiling slept, and he looked like a child at play.

We were past the Horn and never a cloud crept over the windless sky
When we sewed him up in his canvas shroud and we closed his fearless eye.
When the skipper had read "Our Father Which" we lowered him gently down,
And we drank to his name in sixty days when we came to Frisco town.



A Story of
Old Italy

By

F. R. BUCKLEY

POSTSCRIPTUM

TO HIS Excellency the Seigneur Comte Jésus-Marie Jean-Baptiste d'Astorg, Ambassador of his Majesty of France, at the Court-Ducal of Costecaldo; from his Lordship's humble servant L. Caradosso, these:

Excellency;

IF YOUR Lordship will cast back his mind to last Feast of the Blessed Innocents, or possibly two days later, according to the speed of the messenger, he will perhaps remember a letter in which the undersigned (then fresh returned from command of the Costecaldian armies to this place of his retirement) presumed to correct certain errors of your Excellency in regard to the marriage of his late Grace, my Lord Duke Guglielmo III of Rometia, whom God receive, Amen!

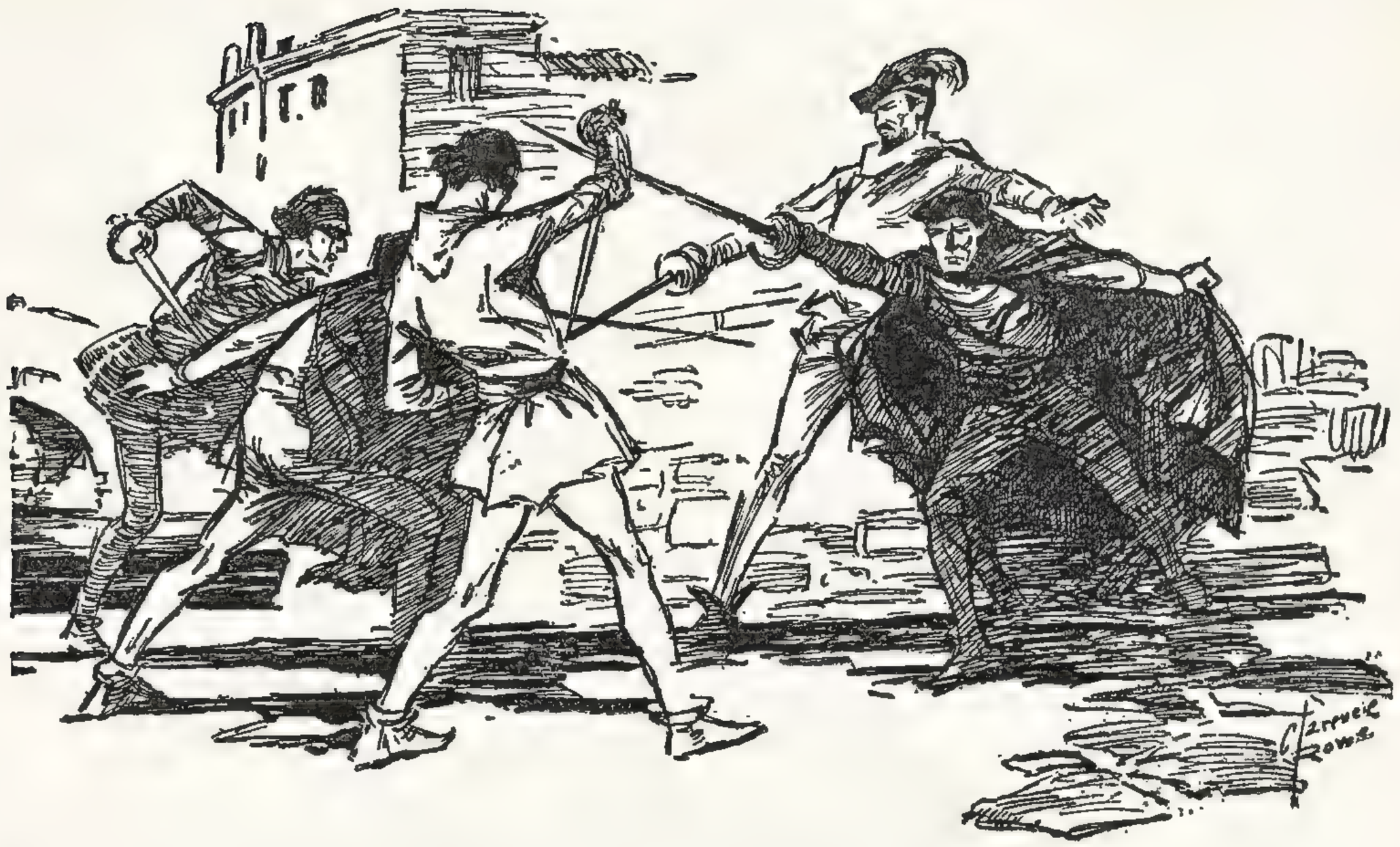
If your Excellency will furthermore condescend to convey his recollection—

But I can not juggle grammar thus. Sense before politeness. I will be plain and in order with your Lordship, stating that this epistle comes to correct a gross carelessness in the former. I am an old man, accustomed more to sword hilts than to pens; moreover, subject, in this seventy-eighth year of my age, to the rheumaticks. Whereby it happened that, having spent much paper proving to your Excellency that Guglielmo was of all nobles, living or dead, the most potent, the subtlest, the least bound by scruple or by ordinary human feeling, the least likely to be made *cornuto*, as your Lordship had supposed him to have been—at the end of all this, I said baldly that he was poisoned by his own son.

The brevity was to spare my right hand, tormented by a cramp which even already beginneth to excruciate me anew.

O lamentable economy!

Sir—it was thus. As I wrote you, my lord duke, having gained Valdifiore,



In which a cruel duke who dared trust none of his subjects, imposes too great faith in the love of his son

Rastelli and Tramoia from that balked wedding with the Lady Ginevra, wed in due course Maria of Venieto, and had issue one son. His name was Paolo, though he ruled later as Guglielmo IV; and the calamity of his birth occurred some years after I had ceased to be captain of the guard. Yes, I was already retired to this farm; partly because of wounds gained in the duke his service—forty years, under him and his father—but to a greater degree, because of the Duchess Maria. There was a woman! Thrice she attempted my life; when I took sanctuary amid the grapevines, she practised against my pension; and even in death, she must give birth to this son of hers.

The duke, having robbed, imprisoned or otherwise estranged all his female relatives, himself brought the boy from infancy to childhood—naturally with the assistance of certain wet nurses, dry nurses and physicians—and by the aid of God and some twenty tutors, reared him thence into young manhood.

During the which time no additions were made to the duchy; no annexations, even of adjoining land left lordless by death or otherwise; and it was whispered to me, by old friends who passed my dunghill, that on the other hand no steps were being taken by his Grace to check alliances menacing his present state. He was (they said) quite bound up in the boy, regardless of all but his welfare.

"'TIS INCREDIBLE," says I, leaning on my spade and trying to remember when Gugilelmo had shown so much as a flicker of kindness for any but himself.

"Nevertheless," says my informant, "'tis true. Even notorious. Especially among his enemies."

"'Twould be ill welfare for the lad,"

says I, "if he succeeded to an overthrown throne."

"Ha!" laughs old Roberto—Roberto Falducci it was; the captain of freelances, on his way to Venice. "Small chance of that. The youngster is off to Padua shortly, to learn some'at—law, I think. Then Guglielmo shall be himself again—and God have mercy on the surrounding nobility. We'll see thee back in harness yet, Luigi!"

And he was right; we descended upon Monterosso that very autumn, and added it to the duchy. During the winter the hostile alliance which had waited too long struck desperately and was exterminated quite in the old manner. Guglielmo was indeed himself again; older and grayer, of course; a little wearier after a battle and now occasionally honorable in his dealings with women; but otherwise just the Guglielmo of the glorious old days. Or so I thought, until the armies returned to Rometia, and I saw him face to face with his son.

I have dealt with the two campaigns briefly, to conserve your Lordship's time and eyesight; but let your Excellency be assured that they were no mean affairs; they were well considered among soldiers at the time; and by no soldiers were they better thought of than by his Grace Guglielmo and his Captain-General, L. Caradosso. It was therefore somewhat of a shock to both my master and myself when we found our bitter won victories received coldly by the pinch faced, herring muzzled, tow headed, slink eyed spawn of abomination for whom (in the eventuality) we had won them.

I allude, with due apology, to my Lord Paolo; whom, on his return from Padua for a visit, I found sitting sulkily in the duke his cabinet.

"But, my child—" says Guglielmo, as I was shown in by the sentry he had sent for me.

"Who's this?" Paolo demanded.

"My Lord," says Guglielmo, rising, "it is Luigi Caradosso, captain in my campaigns before thou wert born, and lately come from his retirement to aid in these new wars for the extension of—thy—duchy."

The young man neither rose, spoke, nor ceased his scrutiny of me. And for a moment his father used a tone which I remembered, and which caused the cold shivers to run up and down my spine—hot as I was at the young whelp's insolence.

"Before God, then, Paolo, thou dost not seem over grateful! Here's—"

The youth rose now and whirled upon his father.

"Why should I be grateful?" he burst out. "Who in the devil's name asked thee to go campaigning after more lands? Are there not stinking peasants enough to be looked after when I come to the throne? Shall I not have enough enemies as it is, without making more? Am I to spend all my life fighting and roaring and plotting and working when I am done with this damned, damned grind at the school?"

O what a pretty young man! Livid from lips to eyes, and his features twisting about like weevils in a flour barrel.

"Continue but like this," raves forth the noble gentleman, "and there shall be no duchy big or small! Thou'rt too old for such doings. I've told thee ere this; thou'rt out of the times; I should be in thy place—I, who know what—I, who—while I'm yet young enow to take some pleasure—"

"Duchies are not pleasure gardens," says Guglielmo, breaking in on the youths stammerings with a sternness that stopped him.

But in a moment, he came round the table and laid hand on the boy's shoulder and spoke to him lovingly again. Alack, alack! O woe the day! Where was that Guglielmo who last week had hanged four barons from one tree?

"My son, thou dost not understand. Let us talk a little together, and I am sure—"

"I'll not be scolded before a common soldier!" scowls the Lord Paolo. "Loose me! Let him go—or I will."

Guglielmo dropped his hand and looked

at me, smiling queerly. Ah, sir! When such a man as he was, smiles under such circumstances as this—

"Have I the permission of your Highness to retire?" says I, saluting.

"Dismissed," says the duke hoarsely; and so I went, sweating, down to the guard quarters, there to closet myself with the captain my successor and some dozen or two bottles of wine.

"AYE," SAYS this good fellow, after the eighth or ninth. Up to the half dozen he had borne resentment for that I had made the campaigns instead of himself; but that was all gone now. "Aye. Hup! Your pardon, Captain. As I say, aye. That's it. The young—gentleman wants his father's chair. He'll have it, too, by God! Now mark me!"

"The duke's a many years yet to live," says I. "Thank God for that!"

"Aye?" says the captain. "Hup! Your pardon. Aye? Well, let us thank God for it, then—since you say so. Another stoup, Captain."

"Certes never while he's alive," says I, holding forth my tankard, "will he abdicate for yon—"

"No?" says my boon companion. "No? Your health, Captain. Never ab—abd—well, let us thank God for that too—since you say so."

Suddenly he leaned across the table, put down his mug and laid one forefinger aside his battered nose. A poor liquor holder—for which also, being in the habit, I thanked God.

"Sit thee, Master Captain-General," says my friend. "Take command of my army if thou wilt, but talk not to me of matters such as this. Politics. Abdi—hup! Pardon. Nay, nay. Remember that as captain of the guard I am somewhat knowledgeable—even I. Thou mayest—for the time being—control my soldiers; but I am still—hup!—*the master of of the spies*. Mark that. I know—what I know."

And it was evidently his intention to preserve his knowledge inviolate to himself, a hog's procedure which I could by no means tolerate. So—having listened to him while he told me how Guglielmo was to build a whole new wing to the palace for his son, and how the duke was reserving for Paolo's bride a lady quite visibly desired by the duke himself—I left the good captain to sleep on the floor and went forth to have speech with spies myself.

THERE were some, still living, that had served under me; and what they had to tell was that young Paolo was plotting.

"Plotting what?" I asked the spy who kept the tavern.

Without speaking, he waved fingers around his red head, crown fashion.

"Oh! In haste?"

He nodded.

"With whom?"

He hesitated. There were customers in the taproom; we were in the dusky garden, under the grape arbor.

"It *was*—Florence and Venice," he whispered.

"Not now?"

He shook his head.

Doubtless, I considered, most soberly, the young man had bethought himself that when these powers had by force of arms got him into the duchy, there might be difficulty in getting them out.

Very right. Very prudent.

"What next?" I demanded; and the man spread his hands, to show that he did not know.

As I turned to leave him, he rushed after me, took the liberty of seizing my sash, and whispered urgently in my ear:

"Captain—say naught of this to the duke. The other captain made mention of it; that's why thou wert recalled to supersede him. He was lucky to escape with his life. The duke will hear nothing—"

"Dog," says I, "art thou pawing me?"

And returned, heavy hearted, to the castle.

Two days later.

O CRAMPS! O fomentations and rubbings with pomades of snakes' backbones all in vain! And to think that there be those who choose to scriven for their livelihood, while money may still be earned sweeping streets!

I proceed, groaning.

From the which instance of devotion to duty, your Lordship may deduce, that never in my history was I a man to be dissuaded by threats from giving to my master any warning I conceived to be necessary. Conceiving it necessary to speak with Guglielmo in this matter of his son's plotting against him, I therefore presented myself before his Grace, said my say with no more than a moderate and excusable trembling at the knees; and was duly ordered under arrest.

I state the matter mildly, saying naught of the expression that came into the duke's eyes when I had finished, and giving no description of how he paced up and down the chamber thereafter, saying nothing, but at each about turn eying me in a way that made my throat itch. Merely I record, with renewed thanks to God and to San Luigi of Policastro, that after half an hour and in consideration of my services in the field, I was dismissed to my farm under no penalties save the abolition of my pension, the repeal of my exemption from taxes and the threat of hanging if ever again I showed my face in Rometia.

I hastened to plant another hundred vines and made a vow that the wine from them should have moss on its cask ere I should again be in the company of princes; wherein I reckoned without the only prince in question, as the makers of such vows always do. His Grace of Rometia was at this time nigh sixty years of age; too clever to please virtuous women, and too old to find pleasure in the others; barred by his exalted rank from companionship with the functionaries of his court; and feared, beyond hope of social intercourse, by those few of his equals whom he had permitted to survive.

When the young Paolo left him to return to his—studies—at Padua, the duke was therefore lonely, thought of me and our rough association of the camps, and dispatched a half troop of horse (which was flattering) to bring me to Rometia willy-nilly.

There was a pardon and safe conduct, of course; to which I paid little attention, having hanged too many bearers of such things while the duchy was a-making.

But he meant me no ill. As I have said, he was lonely. He excused my treasonable utterances on the grounds of well meaning, ignorance, evil companions and old age, and required me to bear him company secretly in the evenings.

"WE WILL talk of this and that," says his Highness. "We have seen enow together, eh, my Caradosso? Of one thing only we will never speak again. I demand thine undertaking as to that."

"I am here under safe conduct," I reminded him.

"Well?"

"If the undertaking mentioned by your Grace must be given," I said, sweating, "I humbly beg your Lordship to permit me to withdraw once more to my farm."

"What?"

"It would not be possible," says I, the sweat turning to ice at his tone, "for me to be in the service of your Grace, under promise to betray your Grace's interests, even at your Grace's own request."

Whereat I saluted, and felt faint; but after some seconds of terrific silence, Guglielmo burst out laughing, said that I was farther gone in senility than he had thought, and bade me rave as I thought fit, so long as I did it for his ear alone.

"And tomorrow," says he, "we will take the air together, old dog, and see the palace I am building for this traitor son of mine. Ho-ho-ho! Ah-ha! But in public, remember—discipline!"

"Sire," says I, saluting.

"Dismissed," says the duke, forgetting me in quite his ancient way and turning to some papers.

WE WALKED the next afternoon under the shell of the palace that was a-building for Paolo. The carpenters were at work on the vaulting of the roof; and we had not been within the walls five minutes when from the height of the second *piano* down came a coping stone big as a man's body, and drove into the earth not an ell from the duke his feet. I will not here detail what befell the two workmen by whose carelessness it had fallen from its sling; I will but inform your Lordship that I made inquiries of them before their decease (which inquiries seemed to reconcile them greatly to the prospect) and found that they were not workmen hired in the usual way, but fellows seemingly so enamoured of labor that they had mingled with the crowd without even seeing that their names were entered on the payrolls. They hoisted rocks, and dropped them, for love of the exercise; at least, if they had some other motive, they refused, despite all my blandishments, to avow it.

So that I said nothing to the duke; but went once more to see the spy that kept the tavern. It was the busy season in his overt trade, and he did not trust his deputy; but on the other hand, he knew me of old, and so it came to pass that he absented himself from his taproom and went to Padua or thereabouts, seeking evidence.

DURING the which excursion of his, and while yet I was mourning the five gold florins I had needs given him for bribes and horse hire, Guglielmo was one evening seized with a fantasy. It was a balmy night in June; there was some kind of townsmen's festival in the marketplace; and my lord would fain follow the example of some infidel or other whose name escapes me and fare forth to see his people enjoy themselves.

"I have sent down certain barrels of wine for them," says he, while a snake eyed serving man dressed him in a suit of my clothes, "and mayhap we will drink some of it, Luigi. Dost remember the red vinegar after the charge at Montemurlo—out of the dock leaf? Best wine, God's wounds, I ever drank."

"We shall be followed by a guard?" says I.

"Indeed?" says Guglielmo, pulling my hat over his eyes.

"One or two soldiers, my Lord," I implored him; but he gave no reply save that we must be going, and I knew him too well to dare more.

Even so, he breathed audibly through his nose for full ten minutes after we had slipped from the castle's side door; and it was not until he had taken two mugs of wine from the pewters that were chained to the barrels that he smiled and spoke to me graciously again.

We did not enjoy ourselves. Red vinegar from a dock leaf (or a slobbered pewter) can be delicious; but one needs a battle beforehand. Shouldering through crowds under torches that throw gobbets of soot on the doublet, and make the hot night hotter still; dancing with wenches to a squeaky fiddle, and kissing them under the ear meantime, may be the stuff of life, and a great renewer of youth—but one must have some youth left to be renewed withal.

So at midnight or thereabouts Guglielmo took my hand, saying that things had changed for the duller since his day; and we went home. My knees ached, and a great mare I'd danced with had trodden on my worst shoe sore; and moreover the duke, what time he leaned heavily upon me, must needs talk of his son, that serpent Paolo, growing lamentably to manhood in a world from which all gaiety had departed.

"When I was his age, such a fiesta as yon—" says he; whereat we turned a corner to find ourselves confronted by four men, masked and with drawn swords.

Of strange manners; for they did not tell us to stand and deliver; they said no word; simply they spread a little to enflank us, and rushed forward to our destruction.

God is good; there was a little narrow alleyway, into which I thrust his Grace (he was fumbling for his hilt under my

unfamiliar cloak) and with a wild lunge I chanced to drive my point through the throat of the foremost attacker. He had tough neck bones, that one; they wrenched the sword from my hands. And before I could pick up the blade for which the fellow had no further occasion, one of his friends had leveled me to the pavement. He had struck with the edge, wholly disposed to behead me, but the hilt had turned in his hand, and it was the flat that smote my neck. The man, judging by the force of his blow, was so strong that it was to him that I gave my attention next.

While he mowed at my dark form in the obscurity and missed, being distracted by a lunge from Guglielmo, now sprung forth from the alley, I reached sweetly up and slid two hands' breadths of blade into his belly. He screamed very loudly and leaped very high; and then he sat in the kennel, holding his wound and weeping curses—in a Paduan dialect.

"I am the duke!" came Guglielmo's voice as I scrambled to my feet.

How furious he sounded! And how certain that at the news his assailants would drop their jaws and their weapons and kneel for justice! Alas! He let his point waver in anticipation, and the fellow to his left sent in a lively thrust at the face. I deflected it with my bare left hand; but there was no breaking its force; wherefore his Grace was run through the shoulder. This is a sensitive spot, as I have proved some five times in my own person; and age does not seem to dull this sensibility as it does some others.

My lord was in the first place surprised; in the second, hurt; he was, so to say, goaded like some noble variety of ox, if I may without disrespect use such a term, my object being to excuse the somewhat vulgar actions in which his Grace was now pleased to indulge.

He made a wild sweep with his sword, which was well enough save that it almost slew me; though nobles do as a rule restrict themselves to the more delicate point. But no sooner had the bravo that had pinked him fallen down with his head asunder, than his Highness dropped his sword altogether, rushed at the adversary still remaining and, falling with this common fellow into the roadway, there and then strangled him to death with his own hands.

It was a great honor for one who, until I removed his sword and dagger, seemed determined to protest his unworthiness.

AND NOW I pass over the subsequent dealings with the town watch, which had been watching the fiesta and arrived both late and drunk; I omit the details of my examination of the persons of the slain—for they were slain, yea, all four of them.

I merely state that on the day following I exposed to Guglielmo, wound and all, my opinion that these murderers had been sent against him by his son and that the informer as to our movements had been his Grace's tiring man.

As on the previous occasion, I stood to attention and perspired; and I doubt not that I should have had good cause for the perspiration had not wound and fury together proved too much for his Lordship's heart and stretched him fainting across his table. It was but a faint, and in no wise dangerous; but in the instant before its descent upon his Grace, I had perceived as in a great flash of lightning, from what fate this faint had—by God His Grace—saved me. I had seen—as I thought, too late—that for the man who should place himself between Guglielmo the Terrible and this one object of his love, there would be an exceeding evil end; the which end, having been once saved, I was in no mood to invite.

When, therefore, my tavern keeping spy returned in the early hours of that very morning, bearing papers that proved Paolo's conspiracy with the Florentines against Guglielmo his father, I sealed the said papers in a packet; and, leaving the packet with the duke's secretary, I fled from the duchy as though the devil were after me.

I went to Costecaldo, where your Excellency is graciously pleased to reside at the time of this writing. I sought refuge with an ex-captain of the Costecaldian guard very similar to myself in wounds and ideas; now dead, God rest his soul, by eating shellfish. And I was very content, lost though I considered my little farm, until on a chilly day in September up rode the same half company of horse that had fetched me to Rometia on the previous occasion, whose lieutenant demanded that I once more accompany him thither.

I was for drawing sword and refusing; but besides a safe conduct signed by Guglielmo—in a shaky hand—they presented to me a guarantee, protection and permission by the Duke of Costecaldo, so I went. My old friend was sorry; but then he brightened and said that if Guglielmo hanged me from under the protection of Costecaldo, certes there would be war between the duchies; which might give Bernardo a chance to command once again. Aye, aye! O miserable oysters! I never saw him more.

AS IS evident, Guglielmo did not hang me.

Nor, on the other hand, was it his purpose to forgive me my base slanders against his dearly beloved. He had sent for me (and his cavalry had been a month at the search) on the other hand to defend the ever accursed swine aforesaid, against the proofs contained in those papers I had left. The Duke Guglielmo—and your Excellency may know of how many places he was count, overlord, or tyrant—stooping to bandy accusation and defense with an old captain! Alas! What can degrade the highest reason of man so utterly as can love, his highest emotion?

His Grace was sitting before the fire in his great chair. He had had a fever from his wound and looked very pale and frail even now. But he was burning with eagerness, could not even wait until the servant had left the room.

"Luigi Caradosso," says he, thrusting out a paper to me, "read this! Read it and be ashamed!"

And ashamed I was, my Lord, though not as he intended. The paper was a letter from the young Paolo, written, by its date, just after he would have discovered the loss of those betraying papers; and it was on this young gentleman's account that the blush mounted my cheeks—that he could be so obvious and so clumsy a liar as herein he proved himself to be. Aye, when he found his plot blown upon, what had he done but write to his father recounting how, for the future benefit of Rometia, he had *pretended* to plot thus and so forth; how, musing on the virtues of his father and the love subsisting between them, he had been unable to support even the appearance of evil; by which token he had abandoned his plan; and now he wrote this letter, fearing that perchance some ill wisher might try to convince the said father that the plot had been real.

"The which, as thou knowest, Caradosso," says his Grace severely, "was indeed the case. Though I absolve thee of any ill intent."

Handing back the letter, I stared at Guglielmo. I could not help it. Was it possible that he, eagle of councils where every man at the board was a liar to deceive the very elect—could it be that he believed this transparent falsity? My jaw dropped. Aye, indeed he did. And by a look which sprang suddenly into his eyes, I perceived that he was aware of my unbelief.

"Well?" says the duke in that voice which was ever the equal of a hot bath to me. The water dripped off my forehead as I stood there. "I do not hear thine apology, Caradosso. I say apology, no more, though to have accused my son, at the very time when he was taking grave risk to aid me—"

I said nothing; the great fire crackled and roared up the chimney; and the duke's favorite dog snuffed about my ankles. I saw the pupils of Guglielmo's eyes contract.

"By the splendor of God!" says he, in a

strange snarling voice he had for such occasions. "What's this, Master Captain? Silence? Am I to believe thou holdest still to thy worthless papers, that possibly thou darest to disbelieve this explanation by my Lord Paolo?"

Ah, he was old; he had been ill. Now for the first time in my knowledge of him he let fury carry him away, past the ordering of my arrest, or the stabbing of me then and there, to the mere rage choked gasping of reproaches.

"After thy service with me—the benefits I have heaped on thee," says Guglielmo, "when I have deigned to disprove thine accusations instead of having thee hanged, thou darest — darest — despite this letter I have shown thee—stand there—calling my son a liar; persisting that he would murder me, depose me—when he hath explained all. When—look you—this very night he hath sent me this token of his love."

He snatched up from the table a very richly gilded box that had stood by his tankard; he held it toward me, but so did his hand shake that it slipped from his grasp and fell to the stone floor, where it burst open, and the comfits it contained rolled hither and yon about the flags.

And the great dog, seeing the dainties where of habit his meat was thrown, leaped forward; and before I could beat him away from the sweetmeats, he had licked up one and swallowed it.

WHEREAFTER the dog sat down and made a choking noise in his throat; and then he whined and threw himself violently sidewise; lastly lying down and stretching forth his legs stiffly—stone dead.

The duke drew a long breath through his teeth. I did not look at him, because my eyes were fixed, as in a paralysis, upon the dog. The fire cracked loudly, and the chimney received a long flight of sparks.

"So this—" says Guglielmo; but I do not know what he meant.

After a little while he said to himself in a low voice—

"My son."

Whereat I fixed my eyes upon him, instead of on the dog, still stunned, if your Excellency may comprehend me; dazed, so to say.

I heard Guglielmo laugh to himself, in no wise bitterly, his usual laugh, albeit I had rarely heard it. Then, still dazed, and unwitting what was the purport of what I saw, I perceived him reach down from his chair and pick up one of the comfits; from which, still staring at the fire, he bit the half.

At this my senses returned to me and I sprang forward, shouting some nonsense, and with the intent to lay hands upon his Highness. But he had eaten the comfit—aye, swallowed it—before I could reach him; and while I shook him by the shoulders, still shouting I know not what, he was smiling and dusting his hands together to rid them of the powdered sugar.

"Stand back, dog," says he calmly and without raising his voice, in such manner that I obeyed without knowing that I obeyed.

"That is well," says he, and contemplated something in the fire, from which he seemed to draw much amusement.

Meantime I heard the sound of running feet in the stone corridor. My shouts had been heard.

"Farewell, Luigi," says Guglielmo. "I depart gladly."

Then he choked, as the dog had choked; and then the room was suddenly full of men at arms and strangers of all cloths, who whirled about and shouted for physicians and demanded of me had I murdered the good duke; and when at last they parted ranks, I saw my master lying back in his chair, of course, dead.

So that your Excellency may see clearly. . .

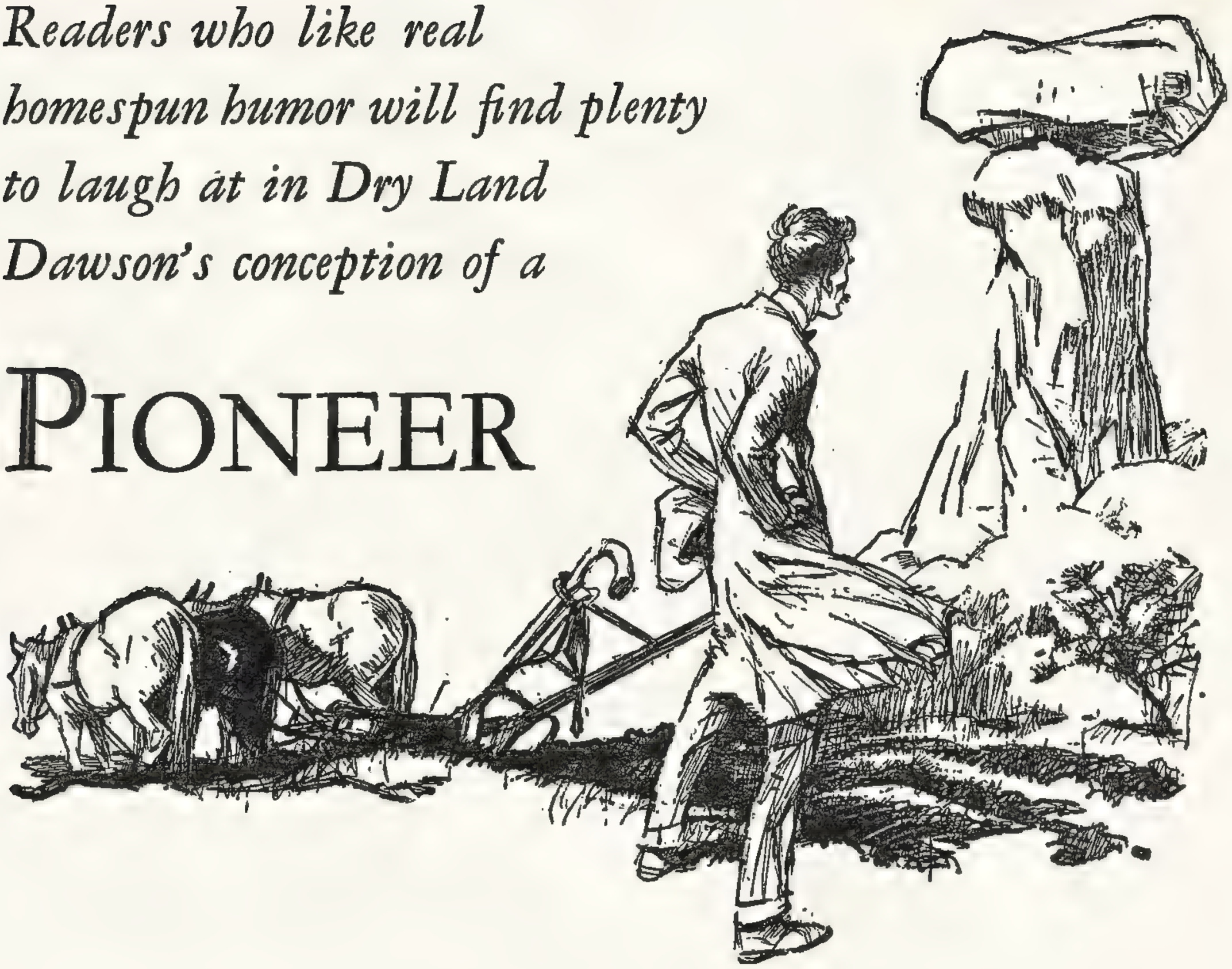
I would say that this was Guglielmo the Terrible to the end, to all save . . .

It was indeed his son, his own son, that slew him; and it was indeed by poison, as I have said; but—I can write no more.

—L. CARADOSSO

Readers who like real homespun humor will find plenty to laugh at in Dry Land Dawson's conception of a

PIONEER



By HARRY G. HUSE

"I KNOWED she was goin' to up and bust down on us," said Loomis, the separator man. "I knowed it this mornin' an' said as much at breakfas'!"

He wiped the machine grease from his arms, and glared at the other members of the crew who had already sought the shade of the straw pile.

"Well, come an' set down an' git the weight off your feet," said Fife, the water wagon flunkey. "She's done busted down an' she's goin' to stay busted down till Culp gits back with a new pinion."

"I figgered she was goin' to do it," challenged Loomis. "I said so when we was eatin' breakfas'. Soon's I see we're likely to git through here this afternoon time enough to pull up an' move on over to the next settin', I says it'll be jest like her to up an' give down on us 'bout an hour before we're finished!"

He moved about aimlessly, peering down the road along which Culp's battered car had vanished townward, turning to glower at the dusty separator and the snaky belt drooping listlessly to the engine.

"Set down an' take it easy," said Fife, and tendered his plug of Climax.

Loomis reached for the slab of tobacco. He bit deeply into its one unscalloped corner, and returned the ravished remnant to its owner. He stood for a moment kicking at the tufts of stubble about his feet. Then he moved back to the separator to tinker irritably with its exposed vitals.

"He ain't hardly got, that feller," remarked Fife, after a moment's silence, "the necessary patience for a Montana dry farmer."

"That's right," said the man from the

Goosebill. "That's jest what I was thinkin'. He ain't hardly cut out for this country. Too nervous-like and jumpy. 'Minds me of a feller I once knowed back in Ioway. Had a big red birthmark 'tween his shoulder blades used to itch him somethin' ter'ble. Folks said he'd got all the door jambs in his house wore plumb smooth where he'd backed up an' rubbed ag'in them. There was one time to a dance when he was waltzin' the 'Blue Danube' with a toney city lady from Cedar Rapids—"

"Say," burst out young Speers, a freckle faced header barge driver, "I hear a speech some big political feller give Fourth of July what told jest the kind of folks it takes to make a go of it in this country.

" 'Montana's still the last frontier,' this feller says. 'All that's happened is the scenery's changed a little. There's more towns now, an' they got grain elevators stead of chutes for loadin' cattle. But out here on the benches,' he says, 'we're the same breed of frontiersmen, a-buckin' blizzards an' dry weather an' a-dodgin' hailstorms.

" 'Montana still rewards,' he says, 'them that courts her with the old pioneer virtues of courage an' patience an' vision!' "

"H'mphh!" said Dry Land Dawson, looking up from a pair of overalls into whose frayed areas he was setting a series of remarkable patches.

"Well, that's what this feller claimed," said young Speers.

THE old homesteader bit off his thread, reknotted it, and eyed his handiwork.

"Sure that's what he claimed," he agreed. "I heard him my own self."

" 'Courage an' patience an' vision,' that's what he claimed," persisted young Speers, " 'the earmarks of Montana citizens past an' present. Lewis an' Clark, forgin' toward the settin' sun, huntin' a route to the Pacific Ocean—' "

He paused, gulped down his embarrassment, and proceeded.

" 'An' then McKenzie an' Culbertson, buyin' furs from the Indians. An' the Stuarts huntin' gold in Alder Gulch an' leadin' in a big army of prospectors. An' the first cattle men runnin' herds on the range before it was free of buffalo. An' then the dry landers with their plows an' barb' wire fences. An' now us agerculturists that've mastered the science of dry farmin'! All men of courage an' patience an' vision!' "

He fell silent, flushing beneath his freckles, eying Dry Land apprehensively.

The old homesteader continued to ply his needle. He turned a corner painfully, and paused to readjust his spectacles.

"That's what the feller said all right," he agreed. "Your memory's A-Number One an' deservin' of commendation. Your quotation of the speaker's remarks is practically verbatim with the exception of one or two onfortunate errors of pronounciation. Nevertheless, I still feel myself inclined to remark, humph, as I done at the outset of your dissertation."

"Well, it sounded real true like when I heard it," maintained young Speers.

"Sure it did," said Dry Land. "It always does when a political feller's talkin' nice to folks he wants to keep happy an' git the votes of."

"But you've talked a lot your own self, Mr. Dawson, 'bout these early pioneers. You've said a lot of times this country wa'n't an' ain't no place for weaklin's."

"I have," said Dry Land, with dignity. "Bein' familiar with the annals of the West from perusal of hist'ries an' other documents, I am not onmindful of the part played in the development of the State by men of action. Knowin' first hand many of the settlers that come in when the range was throwed open to homesteaders, I have related now an' ag'in anecdotes of the first dry landers. I have give them credit for many virtues as well as vices. I have accused them of hopefulness an' bullheadedness an' of yearnin' for romance and adventure 'thout recognizin' them when they come up an' bite them. But I ain't never accused them of patience or vision!"

"But that's what this feller said was the big thing 'bout the pioneer," still protested young Speers. "Lookin' 'way ahead an' dreamin' of the future!"

"Uh-huh," admitted Dry Land, "that's the way he's always pitchered. I've see him a-many's the time in books. Standin' on the deck of a ship or in the middle of a piece of prairie, with his hand shadin' his eyes, gazin' 'way off where it seems like he can see skyscrapers, or maybe packin' house chimneys risin'. Uh-huh. That's your true pioneer. But I ain't never see one!"

"Say, talkin' of seein' a long ways," spoke up the man from the Goosebill, "when I'm to home I got me a telescope I bought outa the mail order catalog. Cost me three dollars and seventy two cents an' makes fur off things look plumb under my nose. Once I had it pointin' up at a big butte stands off a couple miles from my place an' I could see a prairie dog throwin' dirt outa his hole clear as anythin'. I used to look at the moon but—"

"Fidgets!" said Dry Land Dawson.

"What's that?" asked the man from the Goosebill.

"I said fidgets," repeated the old homesteader. "Fidgets!"

"I thought for a minute," said the man from the Goosebill, "you said fiddlesticks."

Dry Land laid aside his sewing.

"Fidgets!" he reiterated.

HE PUSHED his spectacles astride his forehead, and gazed at Lc[illegible] where he still prowled pettishly about the separator.

"That's what makes your true pioneer. Not patience and vision. Just plain fidgets. That's what made the most thorough goin' pioneer this country's ever knowed!"

He fell silent, his eyes glazed with reminiscence.

"Meanin' one of them Lewis an' Clark fellers?" asked Fife, politely.

"Meanin' no such thing," said Dry Land. "They was only explorers that passed through the country. I'm talkin' of real pioneers, an' referrin' particularly to Frederick William Spitz, my old time neighbor."

"Hmm," said the man from the Goosebill. "Fred Spitz, hmm? Don't know as I ever heard of him. We had a feller named Swallow one time workin' over on the Goosebill—Ben Swallow, his name was, tall, gaunted up feller with a bald head an' a big Adam's apple."

"Frederick William Spitz," corrected Dry Land. "The three names always went together."

He fell silent again, sunk in mellow recollection.

"Frederick — William — Spitz," he mused, his faded blue eyes sweeping the miles of nodding wheat where the bleak buildings of the dry landers thrust up starkly, like lonely ships inexplicably becalmed on an undulating, windswept ocean.

"Frederick—William—Spitz, an' his oncurable, fidgettin' pioneerin' fidgets!

"It took me quite a spell," explained the old homesteader, when he had mustered his memories and permitted the man from the Goosebill to finish telling what had happened once when he had reversed his telescope and pointed the small end at a neighbor's outbuildings, "to arrive at the basic truth already stated regardin' what makes your true pioneer.

"Mostly I'd took my ideas from the books that makes them all out to be stern faced fellers and big boned, upstandin' women that've got too strong for the parts back where they come from an' are out a-huntin' perils and hardships to be bore 'thout flinchin'.

"I'd got it in my mind somehow they was a special breed of people scalin' six feet or better in their sock feet an' needin' a big dose of danger four, five times a day to be real happy.

"I 'member I'd worried some 'bout not measurin up to the specifications myself, bein' only five foot eight and gaunted up some from always eatin' my own cookin'. I didn't really git to feelin' right about myself until the homesteaders started comin' in earnest an' I see the class of

folks that was gittin' down off the train at the railway station.

"Here an' there you'd see a feller with big hands an' a red neck that'd stoop down an' pick up a handful of dirt an' let it run through his fingers an' ask when it rained last an' what did we do out here for feed for our work horses. But mostly it seemed like the bulk of the new settlers was bookkeepers with asthma an' old maid school teachers an' busted down railway mail clerks an' normal school perfessors.

"I was all het up for quite a spell over the idea of the railroads an' land agents havin' herded such a bunch of people out here. Seemed like it was a crime ag'in them an' ag'in the country. It was only later, when I see our new citizens buckin' up ag'in conditions that'd of scared out your ordinary successful farmer from ever tryin', that it commenced to come to me that like as not it'd always been just such onsatisfied folks that done the real pioneerin' while the solid substantial ones stay back home and took no chances.

"After while I learned somethin' else 'bout it's bein' what your pioneer runs into an' licks that makes him strong instead of him bein' so strong in the first place that he can lick anythin' he runs into. But that's gittin' away from the main figger in the story.

"HE COME quite a long time after most of the homesteaders had already got here. We'd already got used to strange sights out on the bench. We'd seen fellers, whose previous farmin' experience hadn't gone beyond repottin' the root bound geraniums in the front window, a hop skip an' jumpin' along back of a jack rabbit breakin' plow, tryin' to keep the horses in the furrow, an' their hands on the handles, an' their feet on the ground, an' the point under the sod all at the same time, an' not overly succeedin'.

"We'd seen ladies in white middy blouses an' khaki divided skirts, with rubber gloves on their hands, diggin' post holes an' tryin' to manip'late a barb' wire stretcher. We'd helped harness up horses for folks that didn't know the belly band from the britchin'. A neighbor of mine from Kansas claimed he'd even had to explain to one feller that there was somethin' more to milkin' than just holdin' the bucket underneath and askin' the cow for her cooperation.

"But we hadn't seen nothin' like Frederick William Spitz!

"He come late, as I was sayin'. Some folks might hold that kept him from bein' a real pioneer. He'd been held back some, finishin' his last job of trail blazin' which had to do with some inventions in the artificial leg makin' business in some town back in Indiana. Besides he'd come here on a bicycle, an' it'd took him quite a spell to make the trip.

"Most of the best homesteads was gone when he come pedalin' into Big Coulee. I'd been into town that day an' was on my way out with a load of barb' wire when he come tearin' past me down the coulee. There's a steep grade there for a good half mile. He hadn't no brake an' was tryin' to hold hisself back with the pedals an' it was sure makin' him work. I'd heard him ringin' the little bell he'd got on his machine for quite a spell before I see him. He come on me 'round a corner all of a sudden an' was past before I could see anythin' more'n his linen duster flyin' out straight behind an' his red eyebrows all fierce an' bristly full of yeller dust.

"I was took so by surprise I pulled in my horses an' sat lookin' back down the coulee to see him come out on the flat where the road straightens out to go up onto the bridge. He got there in 'most no time, an' he'd of sailed all the way across the bridge an' into town on his own momentum only there was a flock of sheep had started to cross the road an' they didn't pay no 'tention to his bell a-ringin' an' a-ringin.'

"It seemed like it throwed him a good twenty feet, and the stuff he had packed in one of these here telescope suit cases fastened on his handle bars, went even further yet.

"It didn't seem to hurt him none, the sheep bein' all soft and wooly, 'cause when the dust cleared away from the scared critters runnin' off in all directions, I see him up on his feet pickin' up the things that'd been throwed around when the suitcase busted, and then chargin' down on a big buck ram that'd got a pair of pants caught on his horns an' seemed real mad about it.

"I couldn't of hurt the bicycle none neither, 'cause the next day here he come a-pedalin' an' a dingle-lingin' out past my place with a big map in his hand, a-lookin' for some untook land to homestead.

"Well, I didn't git to visit with him much that day. He stopped in to my place to ask me to show him where he was on the map an' git a drink of water. But he had so much on his mind he didn't really open up much. He just stood wipin' his face with a big handkerchief, an' runnin' his finger 'round inside a standup collar he was wearin', an' lookin' at the map, an' takin' big fierce gulps of water.

"I TRIED to show him on the map where he'd have to go ten miles further on before he'd find a untook half section lyin' in one solid piece. But it didn't seem like he was interested. He'd got his eyes on a string of eight forties that laid end to end in a L shaped piece in between my place, Ed Helms' an' the Widow Billings'. They'd got missed somehow an' the land took up all around them. There didn't nobody want a ranch like that that was only a quarter mile across an' two miles long an' you had to go around a corner.

"But it seemed like Frederick William Spitz, which I could see his name was from where he had it painted on his bicycle, an' worked in red thread on the sleeve of his duster, had got his mind set on homesteadin' them forties. A ranch shaped like that appealed to a man of his disposition, he told me. Folks out here in the West and the Middle West, he said, had just got used to thinkin' that a farm ought to lay in a square or a rectangle. Chances was there wasn't no real convenience in it after all. He had a idea it was another one of these things that was probably wrong 'cause everybody thought it was right. He was just about certain in his own mind that a L shaped piece like this was the proper shape for a wheat ranch. He hadn't had time yet to give the matter as close thought as he would later. Offhand he couldn't state just what the advantages was. But they was bound to be there.

"He'd got the water all drunk now, an' his map folded, an' was gittin' ready to git back on his bicycle. I'd been studyin' some to walk over the piece with him an' show him the boundaries an' visit some about the country an' 'bout where he come from the way we generally done with newcomers.

"But the idea of ownin' a ranch like that an' provin' it was the best shape for dry farmin' was growin' on him so fast he didn't have time for walkin' or for gittin' acquainted. He went a-pedalin' off over the short grass of the prairie in a big wobblin' circle that took him across the string of forties an' back to the road where he could hustle into town an' have his claim recorded.

"The Widow Billings, I 'member, come out of her shack to look at him when he went by, an' he raised his hat to her real high an' stylish, but in a' absent minded manner.

"I didn't see hide or hair of him ag'in for two three weeks. I'd just about got my mind made up he'd found a better ranch somewheres else, one shaped like a W or a Z or somethin', when here he comes one mornin' sittin' high up on the first one of a string of loaded wagons. He'd filed his claim all right that first day he was out here an' then he'd figgered out a new idea of buildin' his house right in town in the lumber yard where everythin' was handy, an' then cuttin' it up in pieces an' movin' it out to his homestead. He'd got all the pieces piled there on the wagons ready to put back together, includin' the necessary outbuildin's.

"Course he hadn't refined the idea

near as much as these modern builders of knockdown houses. He'd just built his buildin' all complete, an' then sawed them in chunks of a size he could handle. He'd been kept from doin' his best work by so many people hangin' round the lumber yard in town an' makin' remarks 'bout what he was doin'. He hadn't been able to saw quite as straight as he'd of liked to. Later he had trouble gittin' the pieces back together an' keepin' them together in a country like this where you git a lot of wind. But he'd done the thing different from the other homesteaders an' he'd give the community a new idea in buildin'.

"I had him to sleep at my house while he was patchin' his house together, an' later when he was puttin' it up ag'in after havin' dug a well in the back yard with dynamite. We got real well acquainted.

"Lookin' back now I 'member he wasn't hardly what you'd call a comfortable feller to be with. He had lots of funny ways like gittin' up in the middle of the night to shave when his vitality was lowest an' them bristly whiskers of his would cut easier. An' he asked a lot of questions an' then argued 'bout the answers. But you kind of had to like his free spirit an' the way he went right ahead an' done things.

"FROM what he told me I guess he'd been in 'most every business you could think of before he come here. He'd managed to leave his mark on each one before he quit. Sometimes the pioneer things he'd done had made him unpopular with what he called sheep minded people. Mostly they'd just talked sarcastic-like 'bout him. But once, when he'd been in the undertakin' business, they'd run him out of town. It was somethin' 'bout reddenin' up a deceased church elder's nose too much while tryin' to make him look more lifelike. There was some trouble too when he was in the collapsible egg crate business.

"But them achievements, he said, was past and gone, an' it was weakenin' to rest upon your laurels. A man, he said, should put his mind on the thing at hand an' bring all his energy to bear upon it.

"Well, sir, that was sure what he done now with this matter of dry farmin'. He put his mind on it. I've never knowed a man to put his mind on anythin' as hard as he done, or to ask as many questions. He'd keep thinkin' of them all the time he was by hisself, an' write them down on paper until he could ask me or somebody else the answers. At first you'd think he was just lookin' for advice, like most of the rest of the newcomers. But nothin' was further from his mind. He was tryin' an' tryin' to find out what was common practise so's he could do the opposite.

"At first there I guess he was sure onsatisfied an' onhappy. This country was so new an' dry farmin' was such a ontried proposition that there wa'n't no rules an' reg'lations an' one man's guess was 'most as good as another's. There wasn't very much for Frederick William Spitz to disagree with.

"Lookin' back at him durin' that first summer I 'member him as a kind of pathetic figger. 'Cept for the way he'd built his house an' dug his well there wasn't anythin' really pioneerin' he could do. He couldn't think of no different way to build his barb' wire fences. He just had to dig the holes first an' set the posts before he could string the wire on them.

"He run up ag'in the same thing when he set to plowin'. The sod was so hard an' tough there wa'n't but one kind of plow would turn it. He did manage to hitch his horses up different, three abreast and one out in front to foller the furrow an' give his outfit a wedge shape. He had an idea it cut down the wind resistance. An' he was able to set things off a little by always plowin' in that linen duster. But taken all in all it was a most onsatisfactory season.

"Most of the load of his discontentedness fell on me an' the Widow Billings, us bein' his clostest neighbors. There when he was sleepin' at my place before he got organized he'd et at the Widow's an' got acquainted with her. She was a big,

strong minded woman but a good feeder. She didn't have no patience with what she called triflin' ways, an' I guess there was lots of times when Frederick William Spitz plumb aggervated her. Her first husband'd been a bookkeeper an' from what she told, as neat and tidy minded as a column of figgers. He'd got low spirited finally an' killed hisself by cuttin' his throat with his razor. The Widow always seemed real proud that he'd done it in the bathtub so's he wouldn't be hard to clean up after.

"Frederick William Spitz, as I say, must of aggervated her. But bein' a widow she didn't let herself seem aggervated. She really was took some, I guess, by Spitz's manners toward women which was gallant even if absent minded. But everythin' 'bout her was just opposite to him. She claimed the way to git ahead was to do things 'cordin' to rule, only to do them harder and stronger than other people.

"He rubbed her crossways all right. That must of been why she took such an int'rest in him. She fed him elegant whenever he et at her place, an' sent him things, an' there at the start she held herself back an' never argued with him. She just kept still, an' sized him up, an' started figgerin' how to take him in hand an' make somethin' steady an' dependable of him.

"He was kind of cramped that first summer, as I already mentioned. It wa'n't till the next year that he commenced to git hold of things an' make the country set up and take notice. 'Most everybody's got some land broke out that first summer an' fall an' planned on lettin' it lay through the winter an' then plantin' a first crop of flax on the new breakin' in the spring.

"FREDERICK WILLIAM SPITZ had done different to be contrary. He'd haggled up his sod one way an' another to git a seed bed an' he'd sowed it in the fall to winter wheat. We had a lot of snow durin' the winter. Then we had a good wet spring. Come May when nobody else had nothin' but a spindly lookin' stand of young flax, Spitz had the likeliest lookin' wheat field I 'most ever see. Folks come from miles around to look at it, it was so green and purty. The banks an' stores in to town had samples of it tied up in bundles an' stuck in their windows. You'd of thought Spitz would of been real proud 'bout it. But it didn't seem like it meant nothin' to him. He was too busy arguin' an' a-buildin' hog sheds.

"He's decided to raise hogs after he'd looked around an' see there wasn't hardly a shoat in the country. It stood to reason there shouldn't be 'cause there wasn't nothin' to feed them. The Experiment Station bulletins said not to try to raise them an' that'd been just like a red rag to a bull with Frederick William Spitz.

"He sent away an' got hisself a lot of brood sows for a starter. Time they got here his wheat was ripe an' he cut an' fed it to them. He'd got enough crop to take them through the winter. Folks said it was a shame to dump money like that into hogs that wouldn't ever pay for the high priced grain you had to feed them. They seemed 'most as hostile 'bout it as if it'd been their own wheat.

"Everybody was complainin' 'bout it. Nobody's flax had done any good an' it wasn't worth while to cut it. Some folks that hadn't had much money was goin' broke an' others was already discouraged. Things would of kept right on bein' real sad like an' onhappy there that fall if it hadn't been for the goin's on of Spitz an' them hogs of his'n. Them sows of his was all due to have pigs in the Spring, an' he was workin' out some ideas 'bout influencin' the ones that was goin' to be by the treatment he give their mothers. He had little houses for them an' he done things to keep them entertained an' contented. It was hard to tell one way or another whether the sows enjoyed it.

"Well, the next year when 'most everybody'd got in a good acreage of wheat an' Spitz hadn't got none because givin' so much of his time an' thought to the pig business, we had a drought. It come

before the wheat was very far in the milk an' it 'shriveled up all the kernels so that what little crop there was wasn't fit for millin'. It wasn't fit for nothin' but hog food an' you could buy all you wanted at your own figger.

"There wasn't no one in the country had hogs but Frederick William Spitz. He had four five hundred of them an' plenty of cheap grain now to feed them. What with sellin' them off at a high price to folks that had decided their selves to go into the hog business an' shippin' the fat ones to market, he sure made a clean-up.

"The comin' fall, when he'd sold off his hogs, he got interested in turkeys. The turkey, he said was a bird he'd always admired. It had a independent spirit. It hid out its nest, an' it trailed its younguns in the wet grass whenever it felt like it, an' it'd rather roost in a tree an' freeze its feet than be comfortable in a hen house.

"Everythin' was ag'in his raisin' turkeys in Montana. The coulees was full of coyotes that'd eat nine turkeys for every one you et yourself, an' there wasn't nothin' cheap to feed them. So Frederick William Spitz got hisself a whole herd of incubators that winter, an' ordered turkey eggs by mail wherever he could git them, an' come spring he had four, five thousand of the little birds.

"That was the year we had the grasshoppers. I never see them so thick in all my life. They ate up half the wheat an' there wasn't nothin' you could do to stop them but call for help from Frederick William Spitz. He'd worked out a system for keepin' his turkeys safe from the coyotes. He'd started herdin' them the way that you do sheep. He'd take his lunch an' go out with them in the early mornin'. He'd stay with them all day an' keep them bunched by ridin' hard on his bicycle, an' he'd watch over them with a rifle. They got so's they'd run right to him when they seen a coyote.

"Well, sir, you should of seen them turkeys go after the grasshoppers. It got so's people would offer him money to bring his army of birds over to their place and graze them. He'd herd them home at night an' the next mornin' him an' his birds would be out ag'in a-skirmishin'. What with the fees he got for his services an' the price he got for the birds in the fall he cleaned up a lot of money.

"That was the way it went for three, four years there. Frederick William Spitz done everythin' on earth 'cept raise wheat the way he was supposed to. An' he never done the same thing two years in succession. Everythin' he turned his hand to seemed to make him somethin'.

"HE WAS gittin' rich, an' the bankers in to town was callin' him mister. But he wasn't happy. Things was gittin' too settled for him. It was gittin' harder an' harder to do any pioneerin'. He'd made out so well that folks was all follerin' his example. They was raisin' hogs an' herdin' turkeys an' diggin' wells with dynamite. Some of them was even thinkin' of ridin' bicycles an' wearin' linen dusters. He'd got to the point where he set the standards an' the feller he had to go contrary to was his own self. He couldn't hardly find no one to disagree with.

"That was always the reason, I figgered, why he commenced to git real thick with the Widow Billings. Her cookin' may of had a little to do with it. But mostly it was because she was the only person that didn't approve of any single thing he'd ever done.

"Now that she'd got him figgered out she didn't hold herself in no longer. She felt he'd just been lucky. Things had just happened to go right for him. Even if he'd got ahead where others had failed he hadn't no right to take much credit. He'd of gone a lot further, she claimed, a man of his talents, if he'd of used the same amount of strength stickin' to the reg'lar way of doin' things like she'd done. She'd plowed an' planted an' summer fallowed just like it said to in the dry farmin' bulletins an' she was gittin' ahead her own self.

"He got real thick with the Widow

Billings 'cause she'd argue with him. Sometimes I could hear the two of them clear over to my place. She'd argue with him every time he come near her, an' he liked it. He liked it so much he couldn't seem to stay away from her. They was havin' it hammer an' tongs, an' gittin' thicker and thicker. Seemed like one of these here helpful friendships like you read about in books.

"But the situation was too good to last long. She got too strong for him. You take a woman that sets her mind real hard on changin' somethin' she thinks needs changin', an' gives it her on-divided attention, an' she'll git around any man that she'd a mind to. I've see it work time after time. Take such things as spittoons in the house, or for that matter, prohibition.

"The widow set her mind on makin' Frederick William Spitz a steady man like the bookkeepin' husband that ended up in the bathtub. She used everythin' ag'in him. She fed him an' flattered him, an' darned his socks an' give him a battle when he wanted a battle, an' little by little she commenced to tame him.

"Well, sir, it sure made me onhappy. It come so slow an' gradual you couldn't hardly see it happen. But it was takin' place. His eyebrows seemed to git less bristly. He never got up no more in the middle of the night to shave. He plowed his ranch in solid patches where he'd had it all striped before, a strip of plow land an' then a strip of unbroken prairie that'd gave, he'd claimed, a maximum of rain and sunlight. He even gave up his linen duster.

"Little by little he got calmer an' calmer. Some folks thought it was a good thing—folks like the bankers in town an' the county agercultural agent. The country, they said, was gittin' in its steadyin' influence on him. Only a few of us knowed what a tragedy was hap-penin'. We watched life in our section of the country git less interestin' an' less invigoratin' an' we knowed the world was bein' robbed of one of its freest an' most independent spirits."

The old homesteader paused to sigh deeply.

"The old, old tragedy of man bein' tamed by woman! It looked like the widow had him. He r'ared back now an' then. He caught a glimpse of the rope like a horse will when you rattle a pail of oats in the pasture. Now an' agin' he'd git real worried an' come over to my place an' visit with me a little 'bout it.

"That's how I come to find out 'bout Pompey's Pillar. It's a chunk of rock that stood off two three miles south of my place, a pillar of rock that'd been left behind when the rest of the land wore down an' that stood up out of the prairie like a kind of chimney. Up on its top was one of these here balanced rocks as big as a house, that stood on one corner an' seemed like a push would tip it over.

"Her and him had argued a lot 'bout old Pompey's Pillar. She'd gave it to him for a object lesson. It's stood there for thousands an' thousands of years, she said, while the rest of the land fell away round it like ordinary people fall away round a big man. It had lasted, she said, ontil it could look down on all of the rest of the world. It's done it, she pointed out, by bein' firm rooted, dependable an' steady.

"THAT was the way a man should be, she'd told him. A man like him that the community already looked up to owed it to the community to rise higher an' higher an' give it some-thin' finer an' stronger to look at. Him an' old Pompey's Pillar. She'd sure fed it to him! He'd argued back that the old rock had been left there by itself all bare an' useless 'cause it'd got on a dead center an' didn't have 'nough gumption to go either one way or the other. But she'd out talked him an' had him half believin'.

"Well, sir, it made me feel real low in my mind when I see how she was puttin' out the fires inside him. You wouldn't hardly believe the changes she'd already made. She'd got him to give up them

high stiff collars of his'n an' wear the slouchy turn over kind that ordinary fellers done. An' she'd made him think that all them best years of his'n when he was livenin' up the undertakin' an' artificial leg an' egg crate business was just so much time wasted. It made me feel real desperate, but he could still out talk anybody but a woman so I couldn't argue with him.

"Well, a month or so goes by, an' then he comes to me an' tells me him an' the widow are aimin' to hitch up together. She's a fine woman, he says, an' the kind of a mate he needs. She's makin' somethin' of him, he tells me. Her an' him are goin' to make a big success in this new country.

"I'm plumb forlorn. There ain't but one thing to make me hopeful. She's got her plans made to go back to Ioway where she come from to make a little visit before her and him step off together. She's goin' to leave him alone there by hisself for two, three weeks.

"For a minute there I'm real cheerful. It ain't too late if he'll use that time to the best advantage.

"An' then I find she ain't aimin' really to leave him by hisself. She's set old Pompey's Pillar there to watch him. She's got him to promise to stop whatever he's doin' reg'lar three times a day, like he'd say his prayers, an' look at the rock an' remember what it stands for.

"Well, she goes away. He takes her in to town and sees her off at the station. He's dressed just like a ordinary man an' he drives her in slow an' easy 'thout even latherin' up his horses. He puts her on the train an' he comes back home down hearted an' lonesome for her.

"After a while he seems to perk up some. I see him fiddlin' now an' ag'in with his gate like he was tryin' to work out some fool contraption to make it open. Later on he hitches up four horses the way he used to, with three abreast an' one out ahead, an' he starts a-plowin' his place haphazard. But presently he looks over at Pompey's Pillar an' goes back for a four-horse evener an' hitches up the critters the way he should of.

"Things go on that way for 'most a week. He'll start to do somethin' new an' joyous like he always used to. Then he'll look over at the rock an' sober down.

"I can watch him from my place an' see the struggle. Nights he'll come over an' set an' talk. He slips back fast after dark when he can't see no longer an' come bed time it seems like he's plumb forgot the widow. He thinks of a hundred different ways to do things. But come mornin' he loses the ideas.

"It run along that way ontil three days before the widow's due to be back. I'm low an' onhappy and so, down underneath, is Frederick William Spitz. It means goodby to the good old happy days of pioneerin'. It means farewell to the wild, free soarin' spirit. It means a restless mind tamed down to the same low level as the masses!"

The old homesteader paused to sigh again and clear his throat.

"We come now to that eventful mornin' of July 23rd an' the natural phenomenon which occurred on that date in this section.

"Somewheres down in the molten interior of the globe, as the papers of that date elegantly stated, somethin' slipped and the crust trembled. In a place like California that was used to earthquakes it might of passed onnoticed. Up here where we're used to the ground stayin' steady under our feet it made a real commotion.

"The shocks was light an' done little or no damage. Them that was in the open hardly felt them. In houses it made pans rattle, an' slopped water out of buckets. I 'member how it hit me at my place. I was doin' a washin' an' seemed to me at first I was just bearin' down too hard on the washboard. When I stopped the house was still a-shakin'. So I went outside to git a club an' chase away a mangy mule of mine that I figgered was rubbin' ag'in a corner. But the mule was eatin' grass a half a mile away.

"FREDERICK WILLIAM SPITZ had been took earlier that mornin' with a strong spell of rebellion. It'd come to him while he was plowin' that he wasn't happy 'bout gittin' married. He looked down at hisself an' at his horses an' at his fields an' he realized he'd got to be nothin' but a pluggin' farmer.

"He got to thinkin' of the glory of them days when he done as he pleased an' let folks say an' think whatever they wanted to about him. He got a sickenin' glimpse of the fences closin' in around him.

"He tried to think of the widow's cookin'. He'd had some of his own tough biscuits an' weak coffee for breakfast, an' he thought of that an' thought of her an' still he couldn't be happy. He turned at last for peace to Pompey's Pillar.

"He turned an' stared an' then he rubbed his eyes. At first he thought he was a little bilious. He rubbed his eyes. The rock was weavin'! He closed his eyes an' passed his hand across his forehead. He opened up his eyes an' the rock was wigglin' worse'n ever.

"Then while he stared it happened. There come a sharper jerk an' Pompey's Pillar kind of hiccuped. The rock on top commenced to wobble. It wobbled forward an' Frederick William Spitz, he wobbled with it. It wobbled back. Then it come tumblin' down off the top in a cloud of dust that took ten minutes to settle.

"The first thing I knowed 'bout it was when I heard Spitz holler. I heard him clear over to my place ag'in the wind. He let out a war whoop that sounded like a wild Injun's. He jumped up and down an' he yelled a hundred yells. Then he onhooked a horse an' got on it an' come on a dead gallop to where he could see me standin'. He couldn't talk at all when he first got there. He couldn't do a thing but point and point.

"'She's wrong,' he finally howled, with his eyebrows bristlin' fiercer than I'd ever seen them. 'She's wrong, an' I told her so at the beginnin'!'

"Well, he come clear back in the next two days. He done everythin' he'd been holdin' off of, an' more besides. Then he went in town an' put his ranch up for sale with all the land agents, an' he bought hisself a new duster an' a dozen stand up collars. He got new tires for his bicycle an' come home an' packed his suitcase.

"But he waited for the widow. You had to give him credit. He met her at the train an' asked about her trip an' hoped that she'd enjoyed it. He brung her out to her place an' set her down. Then he carried in her grips, an' come right out. He didn't feel he needed make no explanations. He just pointed to the wreck of Pompey's Pillar. If he wasn't in a hurry, he told her, he'd like to stop and argue with her. For a while there, he told her, she had him 'most believin'. It took a earthquake to prove that she was wrong. There wasn't no use denyin' nature.

"He said goodby to her, an' he come and said goodby to me, an' he went back home to git his travelin' outfit. He'd got the idea he'd like it in the fruit country farther West where you could raise new things by graftin'. He closed up his house an' mounted his bicycle. I see the widow come out in the yard to look at him when he peddled past. He raised his hat to her real high an' stylish, but in an absent minded manner.".

The old homesteader broke off to gaze in the direction of the separator where a slight commotion had just sprung up. He listened appreciatively to the muffled curses of Loomis who danced there in agony, a mashed thumb in his mouth.

"He'll have hisself all used up, that feller," said the man from the Goosebill, "jest doin' nothin'. He'll be all wore out by the time Culp gits here with the new pinion. 'Minds me of a red headed feller we had over on the Goosebill. Had St. Vitus Dance an' couldn't keep from twitchin'. He ain't cut out for this country. Too nervous-like and jumpy—"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dry Land Dawson.

NOMADS *of the* ANDES

Sidelights on the wild and colorful life of the pampas

By EDGAR YOUNG

SHARP as a knife the chill Antarctic wind roars across the high mesa over which the nomads jog toward the south. There is no road and the troop is spread out in a broad triangle behind the spotted mustang the old casique is riding. Tall and gaunt he sits his prancing horse with careless ease, his body giving to the horse's movements, one toe thrust from his rawhide boots and hooked into each small stirrup, his left hand easing the bit upon the nag's mouth as gently as a coiled spring.

No eighty year old civilized man can compare in strength with the old casique who vaults into the saddle and rides all day with the best of the cavalcade. His white hair, his seamed face, his solemn air are the only marks four score wandering years have left upon him. He is a fit advertisement for meat diet and the benefits of vigorous exercise in the open air. Now his eyes are roving to the south with eagle keenness and it is his gruff command that causes the head riders to halt and await the closing up of the stragglers. He has known in advance that wild horses graze in this part and he has descried a band of them spread out in a shallow valley to the south. For the tableland is high and the pampa is broken and seamed, rutted with transverse cañadons, and lifted into weird flat topped hills to the south.

Each man picks his best mount from the *tropilla* his squaw is leading and bridles it with a light wooden bit, a single rein and a chin strap. The big riding bridles with headstall of rawhide are too heavy for the work in hand. Furthermore he does not saddle his beast. The Tehuelche rides bareback, for speed. The spurs strapped to his heels are points of bone set in wood, naked and sharp as steel. The men and boys strip to their trunks of puma and colt skin, worn with

the hair inside. They spring astride their mounts and await the word.

The horsemen lope easily down into a cañon and struggle up the other side. They gallop across a mesa and dive again into a gulch. The tough mustangs are breathing easily and the riders hold them from tests of speed when they run abreast of each other. There is a thong about the long hair of each rider at the forehead but the wind tugs it backward in a wild mane about his neck. Their naked torsos crouch over the horses' withers against the icy wind. Their bare legs grip the bodies of the beasts behind the forelegs. Save for the scant trunks and moccasin boots they ride naked against the wind. It is the Labrador climate of the southern hemisphere. Horse and man are toughened and inured to it. Off to the right the bleak Andes thrust their tips upward toward the sun.

At the brink of a cañon they view the band of criollos spread out and cropping the tough bunches of pampa grass. There is a wild whinny from the guardian stallion grazing apart, watchful and jealous of the mares and subdued young studs. This buckskin criollo stallion whirls and races up the farther side of the cañon with the band close at his heels and a cloud of dust pouring downward in their wake as the pursuing nomads ride down the other wall in mad pursuit.

Lassos and bolas are in hand and spurs are raking the bellies of their leaping mustangs. The racing nags scramble up the farther side and run recklessly across the rough mesa behind the criollos. The casique's son on the white stallion is in the van and the big animal is straining to keep the band in sight. The ground is broken and rutted, boulder covered, dotted with viscacha holes. Ravine after ravine, gulch after gulch, leap after leap over boulder and over pothole, the nomads lose ground. The wild horses are outrunning the half tamed ones with the riders on their backs. But the nomads know a thing or two.

Mile after mile is covered and the nomads hang to the rear of the criollos, barely keeping them in sight. Then gradually they draw nearer. They are gaining steadily. A man on horseback can overtake a riderless horse. Whip and spur give courage when chest is heaving and legs are tiring. The will of the man drives the lagging beast. With a tremendous spurt under quirt and goad the riders come within a hundred yards of the wild horses, whose heads turn crazily while they peer backward as they run. Then they also spurt ahead. But bolas are falling about them. Horses fall and roll as the thongs wind about their legs.

The nomads leave them floundering where they lie and follow the free horses that dart forward at breakneck speed. Here and there one has snapped a leg and cries plaintively with the peculiar childlike sobbing heard only when a horse is in dire distress. A dozen are picked from the flanks of the herd, a score.

The nomads urge forward, flaying their mounts and shouting. They spread behind the thinned band and ride to the side of them. Lariats whirl. Horse after horse lunges and stops with popping eyes as the noose drops and is drawn taut. The rider springs off. A shorter lasso leaps out and snares the plunging front legs. Horses fall on all sides. Bolas are tossed. The entire band is in hand.

THE CASIQUE'S son has roped the fighting buckskin stallion which is rearing and plunging, leaping into the air. His wild eyes glimpse the white stallion who stands where he was left, prancing and puffing. The rope about his neck grows slack as he runs toward the white with head down and ears flattened. The youth lashes him about the head with his quirt and drives him back while he unbridles the white horse, the boss stallion of the nomad troop. The white now plunges forward and their chests meet with a thud and they rear on hind feet high into the air with heads lifted, striving for the throat hold. Their jaws open wide and their teeth gnash as time after time one grazes the neck of the other. They spring and leap as lightly as cats, their heads dart

back and forth, they flay each other's shoulders and necks with the pounding hoofs. Their high pitched squeals are more of rage than of pain.

Nomads working about the flying hoofs of horses that are down and being hobbled and hogtied dart quick glances as they watch the progress of the fight.

The white stallion spins about in the air and drops to his all fours. His hind hoofs fly out and catch the buckskin flush on the sides. With incredible rapidity he repeats time after time. He is roaring out squeals, running backward and driving the buckskin broadside with double blows of his sharp hoofs. The buckskin flounders and falls and the white stallion whirls and seizes his neck in his wide, foaming mouth. As the bones crunch the boy leaps in. He sets himself and grasps the nostrils of the white horse in his hands. Heaving and strangling, for the horse has no power to breathe through his mouth, he tugs the white horse away. The buckskin stumbles to his feet and with a back toss of his hand the boy again ropes him. The white stallion lifts his head and nickers shrilly. He is boss of the combined herd. He snaps playfully at the youth's hand as he bridles him again.

The squaws come into sight over the brow of a low hill, riding slowly and leading the pack animals in strings behind them. A wild scene is taking place. A score of men are breaking wild horses. They have thrust a bit into their mouths and are giving them the first riding. Other horses with feet tied together are tossing and rolling, straining at their bonds, awaiting their turns. A great exhibition of bareback riding on bucking, plunging horses continues for hours as horse after horse is broken and freed. With their leader subdued and restrained for the time with hobbles on they will not stray.

The toldos have been erected and fires are roaring in front of them. Huge chunks of mare meat are roasting in the embers or on stakes leaning from the windward. The pack and saddled horses are freed and wander with the new criollos. Here and there a squeal and flying hoofs terminate a newmade friendship. The buckskin stallion, erstwhile leader of his band, stands with head down, broken spirited and forlorn. A few of the new horses are hobbled with rawhide bands about their forelegs and a joining band and they rear and move along awkwardly. In a week they will all feel at home. In the meantime sharp eyes will be upon them and ropes will whirl about their necks if they stray. Each man owns what he has caught and there are partnerships with horses caught with two and three different bolas or where one man was unable to successfully rope and tie the horse.

The men and boys are gleeful as they gather at the toldos for the noontime meal. Two or three horses each man has added to his string and a few boys of nine and ten have captured horses of their own. A horse, a saddle, a pair of bolas and a lariat makes a man of any boy. The squaws beam and ask questions as the men and boys slip into their guanaco robes and squat beside the fires, slashing off hunks of meat from the smoking roasts, swallowing handfuls of gristly fat piled near at hand on a rawhide, or taking draughts of clotted blood from an earthen pot. Strong food fitted for strong men. They have worked hard.

AFTER dinner they work on their gear. Saddles are overhauled and new ones made. These are thin boards of Antarctic beech joined by knees of wood cut from the crotch of a small tree or a forked limb. Some shrink wet rawhide over the whole saddle, others ride the tree with a guanaco or puma skin over it. Bridles are both split ear and headstall type, of horsehide worked pliable with brains or braided from the tough skin of a guanaco's neck. Reins are plaited either flat or round. The bit is either of wood with two leather washers on the end outside the horse's mouth or a mere strap of rawhide. The cinches are broad and flat, circling both horse and saddle, and a

lighter band holds the saddle cover in place. Lariats are plaited of rawhide and stretched until they are thin as the little finger and sixty feet long.

The bolas are stones sewn in rawhide at either end of a nine foot thong. The robes are stitched by the women, using wooden bodkins for needles and animal sinews for thread. They also tan and dress the hides for the toldo covers, make the feather bed covers and bolsters and do the camp work. They enjoy the roving life. Thus the afternoon passes.

Early evening finds the women erecting a "pretty house". Luck has been had. They have taken wild horses to add to their strings. It is time to celebrate. Hence the work the squaws and girls are doing. In a long rectangle they have thrust stakes into the ground and have strung lariats along the top. From these they suspend feather mantles and guanaco skins until the sides are enclosed with the exception of a narrow door at one end. Darkness finds a row of fires glowing in a line down through the middle of the enclosure and the female members of the tribe seated on horsehides along the walls. The men and larger boys are missing.

It is a half hour before the casique stalks slowly in at the door with a long line of robed figures following closely. They are very solemn and their robes and buskins give them the appearance of tragedians treading the boards. Their faces are freshly painted and smeared with ocher and grease. Their hair glistens in the bright light cast by the fires. Around and around they stalk between the fires and the seated females with eyes straight ahead in a long oblong ring slowly moving, their feet keeping step. There is nothing exciting but the beat of their feet on the ground is that of a slow beating tomtom. They and the spectators become tuned to this steady beat. Around and around. At the end of an hour they are moving twice as fast and the increase has been imperceptible. Their faces are still solemn, but their eyes are glowing with suppressed fire. Some psychic force is being released and the restraint is giving it terrific power.

The women stare with bated breaths and thumping hearts. Around and around. They are now moving at a slow trot. The casique's hand clutches at his throat and every hand of the trotting line follows the move. The robes are tossed down and the men spring along in their trunks. Their muscular arms and legs are painted and ringed with ocher and gypsum. Solemn as owls they spring along. The speed has gradually increased until it has reached its zenith. The tread of the feet is that of a swiftly beating heart. *Thump-thump-thump-thump* go the feet. The bodies sway, the arms swing. Up and down, up and down, the snaky line rises and falls in the firelight. The old crones have brought out the bone flutes and simultaneously they breathe through them. A barbaric tune surges and shrieks in time with the dancing line. The young squaws rock back and forth with the sway of the older hags.

Every brain in the place is tuned to the beat of the music and the stamp of the feet. Man, woman and child are *en rapport*. Higher and higher wail the flutes. No word of song is uttered. The beat is too high. The pitch is that of ecstasy. The head of the casique whirls, thrusts out on his neck, and peers over his right shoulder, is withdrawn and peers over the left. Every man mimics the move. The heads snap out and back as if on broken necks. The heads of the spectators move back and forth on their swaying bodies. Faster and faster move the stamping feet.

Suddenly the casique whirls about and throws his arms high into the air. An unbelievably shrill yell bursts from his lungs. The line breaks up. The men laugh excitedly as they reach for their robes. The women stand up and begin chattering. The men file out and the women remain to take down the walls of the "pretty house" they have made.

Midnight finds them all sleeping soundly for the trek of the morrow. Tomorrow is another day and with the new horses there is work for willing hands.

Continuing

MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON'S

glamourous novel of Major Davies on a secret mission in the mystery haunted regions of the Mongolian frontier

The DANCE

THE MARAMBA had said, when he handed Major Davies the scented trinket:

"By the willow trees of Van Kure all will be revealed. Brother shall slay brother. Sister shall sacrifice herself. Beware of the man with the green eyes . . . the man with soft hands. Above all, beware the Scarlet Leopard. The raven shall hover . . . I give you something that may aid you. Cherish it . . ."

A week later, on the train to the Siberian town of Chita, traveling in the wake of the mysterious Catron who had been sent from the American embassy at Peking, Davies knew that he was caught in a truly Oriental net of circumstances.

The day before in Manchuria he had been rescued from Chinese bandits by a Japanese friend: and now on the train he realized that he was courting disaster by striking up an acquaintance with a White Russian and his sister who were deliberately returning to Siberia to kill the Red commissar at Chita in payment for an insult to the girl. This youth, Mischa, and the girl, Natasha; Sergeant Duggan, Davies' companion; Ishii, an Oriental—those four and Major Davies found themselves riding the Siberian train in the same compartment with two officers of the Cheka, the dreaded secret service of the Bolsheviki.

The two Chekists were half drunk, but Natasha encouraged the Chekists to drink more, pretending to tipple with them.

"Watch them carefully," she said.

"As soon as we can," whispered Davies, "we'll knock them in the head and get their uniforms. Then *we* shall be safe."

Sergeant Duggan's eyes sparkled.

"Eventually—why not now?" he asked.

"Give them a few minutes more. they're drinking pretty heavily."

of the SCARLET LEOPARDS

ONE OF them, the taller, was nearly asleep, his head drooping on his chest with that vacant stare of the man who has imbibed enough alcohol to poison his whole system.

The other was leering foolishly but was still capable of starting a row if he were aroused.

It became an anxious game, watching the second man. He seemed to be possessed of a copper lined interior. Drinking steadily, he kept going somehow, maintaining his original garrulous state.

Davies, on some pretext, had already closed the door of the compartment so that the many people in the corridor could not look in.

Finally Duggan, getting impatient, quietly slipped his pistol out of its holster. Reaching over, he tapped the man swiftly on the side of the head, a blow that knocked the fellow out instantly, so that he tumbled to the floor, a foolish, surprised look on his face.

"Now," Davies spoke quickly to Natasha and her brother, "you two get into these uniforms immediately; we'll look the other way while you dress."

Natsha smiled understandingly. Davies and Duggan guarded the door. In a very short time Natasha called them. Brother and sister were garbed as members of the Cheka, complete to Brownings and belt, including the distinctive melon pink hat. The discarded clothes were draped on the two unconscious men on the floor.

At the next station Duggan, Davies and Ishii, superintended by Mischa who was very authoritative, half dragged and half carried the two unconscious men to the platform and turned them over to

the police, Mischa stating that the two were suspicious characters who should be locked up.

The true beauty of the maneuver did not appeal to Davies until Natasha gleefully showed him the papers they had taken from the Cheka men. In other words, their two Russian companions were disguised and had papers. It was arranged that in case of question, they were to act as if in charge of the other three who were being taken to parts unknown for imprisonment.

"That should get us through the station at Chita, at any rate," grinned Davies.

"The only danger is that some one may recognize us," Natasha demurred, "but at any rate all they can do is shoot us, and they'd do that anyway, so we are better off and have more chance this way."

There was only one complication. The two frivolous ladies who had refused the invitation of the members of the Cheka exercised their feminine prerogative and changed their minds. In they came, smiling sweetly, and looked very startled when they saw no trace of their former companions.

But this was explained to them very well by Mischa, who stated that the other two had had to get off the train on some duty and had been relieved by himself and his companion. One of the women looked convinced. The other glanced at them all very suspiciously.

After they had left Davies spoke:

"You know it could be very possible that those two are members of the Cheka themselves; there are many women of that class in their ranks, I understand, just as there used to be in the old Okrana, the secret service of the Czar's government. I didn't like the looks of that fat one."

"The one with a face like a wet dog biscuit?" asked Duggan carnestly.

"Exactly."

"She sure was a tough looking baby. She looks homely enough to be a lady detective, at that."

"In any case they won't make any trouble until we get to Chita, as there is no place along here big enough to have any of the Cheka regularly stationed. We can make a quick getaway once we reach the station. We'd better be on the platform ready and waiting when the train pulls in, preferably the back platform, where perhaps we can slip through the crowd unseen."

Natasha was not so optimistic, having more knowledge of the keenness of feminine eyes. They were rapidly nearing Chita even now. As the train entered the outskirts of the town they quietly went to the rear of the train, having noticed that the two women had gone forward when they left.

CHAPTER V

THE RED BEARDED MAN

DAVIES, glancing at the platform as the train slowed down, saw many men in the Cheka uniform. Certainly this town was well policed. Mischa was the first off the train. To an officious young man in uniform who approached Davies and Duggan, Mischa spoke sharply and importantly. The young man saluted and went on about his business.

Davies had all the feelings that he imagined a criminal must have when hunted by the police. Keeping a sharp eye out, he saw the two women again. One of them, the fat one, was in earnest conversation with a gray mustached member of the Cheka, talking very voluably. The gray mustached man was taking voluminous notes. It was lucky for the travelers that the old fellow was so meticulous, as they were out of the station and in the street before he had finished.

Davies started to hail a cab.

Natasha shook her head and he ceased immediately, remembering also that cab drivers are called upon to report arrivals and addresses of all their passengers. The five, led by Natasha, walked away from the station, down a side street poorly lighted, going several

blocks until, at last, they came to a small house set well back from the sidewalk.

"I hope they are still there," said Natasha. She went up to the door and called softly.

There was a slight stirring from inside. The door opened a little; some one answered in a surprised but very happy voice. The travelers entered the house.

An old man, his shoulders bowed, his beard long and white, welcomed them with great joy, kissing the hands of Natasha and her brother.

"It is Piotr, our old servant, who lives here alone with his wife," explained Natasha.

His wife appeared, a little old Russian woman, her face seamed and lined until it looked like a dried apple. But she cried with the joy of seeing the two again and welcomed the strangers hospitably. Soon she had bustled away and set a samovar going. They filed into a small living room where the old woman was setting the table with cracked dishes and cups. In an incredibly short space of time she had a steaming meal prepared for them, the first real meal any of them had tasted for a long time.

Over the rich and fragrant *borsch* and the hot meat pasties, they talked, happy once more to be within four walls and secure for the moment.

It is the custom for Russians to live only for the moment; therefore Davies and Duggan were surprised to see the light hearted gaiety of these two, for any second might bring a knock at the door that would mean certain death.

Ishii rose and went out to look around to see whether the house was shadowed.

THE RUSSIANS grew sad. Natasha had started to question the old people about things in Chita. At the mention of this one's name and that one's name, friends of theirs who had been killed by the Bolsheviki, tears came to Natasha's eyes and the young Russian her brother, looked morose.

In the corner a dim taper burned before the icon.

The brightly polished samovar bubbled and steamed, the old woman hurried about replenishing their plates, the two Americans ate and listened to the quick interchange of question and answer, seeing tears occasionally come to Natasha's eyes as she heard some particularly bad piece of news.

"You see," she explained to Davies, "Semenoff, the Ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks, held Chita for a long, long time with a force of five thousand men. He killed many, many people, many of my friends. Then came the Bolsheviki and they are still killing." She looked somberly at the wall, then raised her head and clenched her hands. "Why, oh why does God punish Russia so severely?" There was despair in her voice.

Davies and Duggan shook their heads. Certainly Russia had been and was being punished beyond all reason. At the same time, reflected Davies, the Russians were the ones who did the punishing, each individual who secured a little power using it to oppress his fellow creatures. The rulers exploited the ruler; rank and power were exercised without responsibility. To Davies came the faint remembrance of a story once heard of this town during the Russo-Japanese War, how the soldiers at the front were short of ammunition and food and warm clothing while at the same time great cars loaded with champagne were being sent over the already burdened Trans-Siberian Railway, cars that were detached for the officers living in luxury back here far behind the front.

As if reading his thoughts Natasha spoke:

"But after all, it is our own fault," she said bitterly, "for what are we? A nation of dreamers too slothful to put our dreams into action. A nation of disputants who dissipate all energies in talk, a race of slaves who had to call in Rurik from Scandinavia to rule over us, who submitted to the domination of Tartars for centuries, who permitted a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy to grind us to the

earth until finally it fell, a nation who now allows a little handful of alien people, the Communists, to dominate us body and soul, ruling us through our selfishness, our desire for self-indulgence at all costs, ruling us as we have always been ruled, through playing on our weaknesses. One hundred and sixty millions of people driven like sheep to the slaughter, by a handful of mangy dogs—I do not wonder that God turns the light of his countenance from us!" Her voice rang out bitterly in the strength of her feelings.

Their hosts looked around fearfully. Davies and Duggan were perturbed. Her brother swore, and spoke to her sharply in Russian.

The old man rose from the table and went outside. In a moment he came back, agitated and trembling. He said something rapidly.

Davies went to the door. There, on the porch, was the body of Ishii, a dagger through his back. His blouse had been ripped off. Studying the body in the light from the doorway, Davies noticed another wound on the bare shoulder. It was a rudely incised representation of a swastika. Only he noted a strange thing; that the swastika did not turn in clockwise direction, but was reversed. He returned to the room, telling the ones inside what had happened.

"Is there any back way out of here?" asked Davies.

Natasha nodded.

"We'd better use it right away, not only for our own safety, but because we will get these good people into trouble if we are caught here. Undoubtedly we are followed. Poor Ishii, I'd like to have a shot at the brutes who killed him. Let's go."

Natasha agreed instantly. The brother was less enthusiastic. Going out into the cold night, leaving this warm coziness did not appeal to him. But he was finally prevailed upon. The four bade goodby to the old couple, who embraced Natsha and her brother tearfully, in spite of their fright at this silent swift murder committed outside their door.

They made their way out a back passageway and came to the rear yard where stood a woodshed, on the far side of which ran an alleyway. Slipping through a gate that led to it, they turned up the alleyway, following it through to where they could see the dim street lights beyond.

THE STREET was wide and fairly well lighted. Substantial brick and stone buildings lined it on both sides. The night was cold. It was necessary to find shelter somewhere. They passed a café, from which came a cheerful hum of music and talk; but through the door they saw the uniforms of two or three members of the Cheka and decided not to risk that place.

They came to a poor quarter of town, near the railroad tracks. They skirted along the tracks, past many small freight cars. A freezing wind was blowing and seemed to penetrate straight to the bone. Davies had some idea of finding an empty car in which a fire might be built. They tried several of the freight cars but found them locked. Crossing through a space between the cars, they tried another track.

Icicles were hanging from some of the cars. Duggan stared at them curiously, then nudged Davies' arm, pointing at the icicles. They had formed of frozen blood and gleamed rosy red in the light from a red street lamp nearby.

They heard a sudden footstep, and a sentry rounded the corner of one of the cars, the long triangular Russian bayonet fixed to his rifle. He was in the Bolshevik uniform, a big red star sewed on his cap, a triangle on his sleeve.

He challenged them.

Mischa answered. The man saw the Cheka uniform and saluted.

The young Russian asked him some questions. He answered them with a chuckle.

Finally they walked away.

"What was it?" asked Davies.

"Oh, nothing," Mischa shrugged his shoulders, "this fellow Urivetsky, the

commissar here, sends out a detachment to arrest some White officers hiding at a way station along the line. Then Urivetsky has a champagne party with two or three women and they ask to be allowed to go and kill all the prisoners. So Urivetsky lets the women shoot them, all joking and laughing, ten former officers, all bound up and lying on the floor of the car. And that's the car back there with the bodies."

Davies listened to this, then shook his head.

"I'm almost beginning to agree with you about the Russians," he said to Natasha.

"Oh, but this Urivetsky is a terrible one; he is much worse than most Russians," she came back, quickly on the defensive.

"Yes, it is my sacred duty to kill him," added Mischa, her brother, a trifle pompously.

"Yeah?" Duggan spoke up dryly. "If we don't find some place to head in pretty soon I'll be killed from the cold. My tootsie-wootsies are friz clean through. Where we headed for anyways?"

"Let's go to the best hotel in town. Very often the darkest place is directly under the lamp," advised Davies.

They agreed, and set forth, arriving in a few minutes at the cheerful portal of the Hotel Dayooria where they walked in as if they owned the place. Like most Russian hotels it contained no lobby or library or smoking rooms, simply a dining room and bedrooms.

The dining room was jammed. People were standing around outside the doors. Little attention was paid to the new arrivals.

Duggan looked over the heads of the crowd at the door.

"It's a good thing we had our chow—there ain't room in there for a flea's brother-in-law," he commented; then staring hard, "seems to be some kinda celebration goin' on—champagne flowing like water."

Davies remembered the story of the officers of the Czar drinking champagne in this same town of Chita while their men perished on the Manchurian fields, then recalled the icicles of blood on the freight car he had just seen.

THERE was only one room available in the hotel. They were shown to it, a large comfortable room, sparely furnished, heated by a stove which opened into the hallway, where stacks of birch wood were piled along at intervals, there being one stove to each two rooms.

Mischa went out quietly while they were looking over the room and they scarcely noticed his going. But as the three sat and chatted they suddenly became aware that he had been gone some time. Natasha grew anxious and listened as twenty minutes, then thirty minutes, passed by and still he did not return.

"I feel that something is wrong," she repeated over and over again.

Occasional footsteps went along the hallway. None stopped at their door, as hopefully, they listened to each new arrival.

From below in the dining room they could hear occasional bursts of music and laughter and the stamping of feet. Finally they heard the sound of many people coming along the hallway.

The people, whoever they were, were laughing and shouting, evidently a band of revelers returning. Natasha leaned forward, listening, a worried look on her face as the steps came nearer and nearer.

At last the crowd stopped outside the door.

They shouted something in drunken gaiety.

Natasha went white.

"They are calling me; we are discovered," she whispered, and rose very proudly and went to the door, flinging it open.

The tall, red bearded man, he of the attack on the Maramba, Urivetsky the commissar, stood unsteadily in the doorway, his greenish eyes blinking drunkenly, his arms about the waists of two women, who leaned against him with flushed faces and eyes too bright.

Disengaging one arm, he waved it drunkenly, leering at Natasha as she stood there, white and calm, and calling something to her in Russian.

"And my two handsome American friends," he added in English. "Hurrah for America—I came all the way up here to invite you to drink with me. Isn't that verree, verree nice?" He smiled cheerfully.

Behind them leered drunken faces. Most of them Russian, and Davies saw one or two Mongols and a Chinese, the latter keen eyed and sober. Behind them were four or five soldiers with business-like rifles.

"Looks as though the house is pinched, Major," said Duggan.

Natasha, her head high, her eyes cold, asked in a firm voice—

"Where is my brother?"

"Oh, your little brother," one of the women spoke up, her face blandly smiling, her eyes dreamy, "he is very well. He is waiting downstairs in the dining room for us. He was so nice; I met him in the hallway. It will be very amusing killing him when his time comes to die."

The two women stared at each other, Natasha pale and scornful, her chin tilted high; the other little more than a girl herself, still with that bland, dreamy smile, somewhat the smile of the cocaine addict in the full exhilaration of the drug.

Three of the soldiers came in and quietly went behind the occupants of the room. Davies shrugged his shoulders, looking at Duggan with a wry smile.

"Might as well join their party," he said. "They seem anxious to have us."

They went down the stairs, surrounded by the half drunken group. A large table, untidy with cigaret butts and spilled wines, was set in the center of the room. Around it sat several still more drunken people, men and women, these probably too intoxicated to navigate the stairs.

Near the center of the table was Mischa, looking very angry, two Red sentries behind him. He glanced up sheepishly as the party entered the dining room, led by Urivetsky, the red-bearded commissar, and his two women, followed by Natasha and Davies and Duggan and the soldiers with the rest of the rabble.

They were invited to seat themselves, and wine was poured.

THE WOMAN who had spoken to Natasha came over to Davies. There was something catlike about her, something that made Davies slightly uneasy in spite of her fairly beautiful face and figure.

She sat beside him, leaning against him as she spoke, her hand straying up and down his arm. In her eyes was still that queer, dreamy, staring look.

"Isn't it a charming party?" she asked.

"Why, yes," agreed Davies politely.

"It is charming now," she went on, "but the best will come later," and again she looked at him with that peculiar smile, her eyes seeming to look through him and beyond him as if he did not exist.

But the commissar, Urivetsky, had staggered to his feet and was waving for silence, a glass held unsteadily in his hand.

"*Vashi darovia!*" he toasted Davies, and spilled half the wine down his red beard; then putting down his glass he smiled down the table into Davies' eyes. "What was that old English song?" he asked. "It would make a very fitting toast tonight—you know the one that goes—" again he picked up his glass motioning with it toward the American— "Here's to the dead already, and hurrah for the next who dies!"

A roar of laughter went up from the table, every one joining in except the new guests of the party. Urivetsky turned to Natasha who had been forced to sit beside him, and playfully chucked her under the chin. She threw her head to one side as a boxer does in avoiding a blow.

The girl beside Davies laughed, a long, low, pleased laugh.

"Isn't he funny? He has such a droll sense of humor," she said.

Behind Davies the soldiers lined the wall, eight of them on a side. There were

two dull faced peasants among them but for the most part they were Mongols, staring with hard black eyes.

Duggan was wasting no time in wondering what it was all about. Before him was good food and good wine. He smacked his lips over the wine, finally raising his glass to Urivetsky.

"I dunno your name, Red Whiskers, but here's to you. How!" toasted Duggan, and calmly put down his wine, enjoying every drop of it.

"I like to see men die bravely—" the queer eyed girl at Davies' side turned to him again. "Some of them snivel and cry—but *you* wouldn't do that!" she said flatteringly. "And the other American with you, he will joke as he sees death coming, I think. It will be very interesting to see how Americans die." She sighed pensively, with that dreamy eyed smile still on her face.

The orchestra had begun to play again, something sad and wistful. Davies tried hard to recall the air. "Ah," he said, "that's the 'Swan Song', of Camille Saint-Saens."

"The 'Swan Song'!" echoed the girl at his side, then she turned her head to where Natasha sat. "Sing for us, my dear," she asked sweetly. "That is the 'Swan Song' of Saint-Saëns, it is so beautiful." She smiled beatifically, like a nun.

Davies suddenly went cold inside. The allusion was too perfect to be missed. Of course the swan only sang one song, and that just before its death, according to the fable.

"No—" he suddenly raised his voice—"I would prefer that she did not sing the 'Swan Song'," his voice snapped crisply through the assemblage, so that many looked at him in surprise and the talk died down while the men watched and waited to see what would come next.

THE MUSIC rose and fell, its sad threnody rising above the noise of the dining room, piercingly wistful and haunting.

"And why not?" the girl at his side asked, her eyebrows raised inquiringly.

"Because a swan should never sing among barnyard fowl," Davies replied, and quietly placed his hand inside his coat, where the .45 automatic rested against his chest, snug in its holster.

But every one nodded gravely, almost admiringly, and the girl at his side smiled.

"Ochinn horashaw!" commented several around him. "Very good!" His hand strayed away from his pistol.

As it strayed away it encountered a lump in his vest pocket. He felt of the lump idly, then almost without his own volition, his fingers closed around it and drew it part of the way forth. He placed it back in his pocket.

Behind him the Mongol sentries stood immobile and incurious, ready at a word to put a bullet through his back at a signal from their master, the red bearded Urivetsky. The girl at his side pensively tore a cigaret to pieces, her dainty fingers dragging the fine tobacco forth and tearing the paper into tiny bits, dreamily, quietly and still with that distant smile on her face. Davies tried to imagine her wielding a pistol, holding it in those same dainty fingers, firing it through some one's brain, with that same blank, unseeing smile on her face.

The champagne corks were popping around them. Silver plated buckets containing fresh supplies were behind every chair. The servants, who seemed to be Tartars, kept the glasses filled.

The other woman was sliding her hands through Duggan's curly head much to the good sergeant's embarrassment.

"You are verree nice," she was saying, "and so-o brave a man!"

"How do you know that, kid?" asked Duggan.

"I onlee think so," she replied slowly. "Soon I shall know."

Urivetsky was getting more and more intoxicated. His head rolled from side to side. Occasionally he went to sleep and woke up with a start, staring, dull eyed, at the party. The girl beside Davies began to watch him, a faint line of worry in

her forehead. Finally she went to the commissar, whispering in his ear as he listened in drunken gravity.

He stared at Davies, a dull speculative sort of stare, that had the same effect of looking through him and not seeing him.

Finally he nodded. Then she spoke again, pointing to Duggan. The girl sitting beside Duggan rose and went swiftly to Urivetsky, speaking angrily, and frowning at Davies' girl.

Urivetsky finally waved his hands helplessly, pointing out Davies toward the first girl and waving the second toward Duggan. The two women questioned the red bearded commissar again. He nodded indulgently. They went back to their seats, satisfied.

He rose, swaying drunkenly.

"We're going to move the party across the street," he said. "Want to show a little sport for the ladies—everybody come on."

He waved to the soldiers. They stepped up behind the four prisoners.

DAVIES reached into his vest pocket again. He unscrewed the top of the amethyst box. In that overheated air the strange perfume, compounded of all the fresh scents of spring flowers with a touch of temple incense, filled the air like some overpowering drug.

The Mongol soldiers behind Davies had their rifles at the carry, the bayonets at the position of charge.

Davies heard a stir and movement behind him. He turned his head toward the soldiers, the amethyst box cupped in his hand so that none but those armed men behind his chair could see the ideograph engraved upon it. He looked at them, then turned back to the table, his face a mask.

"*Noyon!*" Davies heard whispered behind him. "*Noyon!*" in voices heavy with awe.

There was the crash of grounded arms. He rose to his feet. Somehow, one did not understand how, he seemed to be ringed with the steel of fixed bayonets.

The people at the table gazed at him in surprise—so tall and so commanding. They stared at the soldiers behind him.

It was as if Davies had suddenly assumed command.

"Urivetsky!" Every one at the table grew silent and perturbed at the ring of command in the voice of the American, that is, every one except Duggan. He nodded, rose and hitched his pistol around from under his armpit and stood, ready and waiting.

"Urivetsky, before any talk of continuing the party, I have to find out something."

Davies looked at the bloated face of the commissar. The man stared back, puzzled, looking from the tall American to the soldiers who stood behind his chair.

"I am, as you know, an American. I am here seeking another American, a man by the name of Catron. Before anything else happens I must know about Catron and where he is."

Every one looked relieved. A babble of voices broke out, and among the confusion of words Davies could make out "Urga — Baron Ungern — Mongolia." Finally the girl beside Davies spoke, clear voiced:

"That man," she said with a grimace, "he has gone to Urga. He left three days ago."

Every one nodded violently; a chorus of "*Da! Da!*" arose. It seemed to be unanimous. Urivetsky also nodded.

"That being the case," Davies went on, "I am very sorry but we can no longer continue at your party, charming as it is and hospitable as you are."

Urivetsky, who in his drunkenness did not yet realize the true situation, rose and waved for silence.

"We are also very sorry, and so sorry are we that I must say it is impossible for you to leave. We have a very amusing little entertainment arranged for you. The girls have asked that they be allowed to have a little amusement, and I can not disappoint them—" He smiled very bleakly, waving to the soldiers behind Davies and pointing to the door.

But the soldiers did not move. Urivetsky scowled at them in anger. He barked something in Russian. They looked at him as if he did not exist.

Davies quietly drew his pistol.

"It is high time we stopped this foolishness," he remarked quietly. "These men are my men. Natasha," he called to her, "ask the soldiers behind me if they will shoot the red bearded man on my order."

Natasha spoke to them. In reply their rifles came up, pointing at Urivetsky's heart. The man grew sickly pale. He sank into his chair. His eyes seemed starting from their sockets. Davies waved the rifles down again.

"Natasha, tell one of the men to guard the front door to the dining room, and one to guard the rear door; tell them to allow no one to enter or to leave. Tell them to disarm the other sentries."

Natasha's voice came clear and strong and commanding.

One of the Mongols went swiftly to the main door, the other took post at the kitchen door. Three of them took the rifles from the two Russian soldiers.

Duggan stood behind Urivetsky, his pistol in his hand.

The girl beside Davies looked up with a slow, sleepy smile.

"You win," she remarked.

"Now, Urivetsky, we start immediately, we need transportation. Natasha, write out an order for three cars equipped with gas, oil and extra tires, for a long trip. Urivetsky will sign it," and Davies tossed a pencil and notebook down the table to the Russian girl, who with eyes flashing, wrote swiftly and handed the paper over to Urivetsky.

The red bearded commissar snorted in contempt and tossed the paper away.

Duggan who stood next him pressed his pistol none too gently into the back of the fellow's head.

"Go pick that up and sign, you red whiskered fish, or I'll scatter what few brains you got all over the scenery!" Duggan's voice was full of menace.

Urivetsky leaned down, picked up the paper very humbly and signed it.

NATASHA, without a word, took the signed paper and went out.

Davies raised his glass.

"How about a little toast?" He thrust it toward Urivetsky. "Here's to the dead already, and hurrah for the next who dies!"

He drank it down. The girl sitting beside him drank to the toast and put her glass down empty, looking up with her vacant smile.

Urivetsky did not touch his glass.

The other Mongol soldiers were quietly disarming the rest of the crowd, bringing up to Davies a collection of revolvers and pistols, among them three Browning automatics with magazines filled.

Davies distributed these among his party, giving one of the Brownings to Duggan, one to Mischa, and keeping one. The revolvers he apportioned among the soldiers.

Natasha returned.

"I've got three cars," she announced, "with extra gas and oil and tires and three drivers."

"Good!" said Davies. "Now Duggan, if you'll escort your red whiskered friend to the car, we'll say good night. Thank you for a pleasant party." He looked after Duggan as the sergeant prodded the red bearded commissar to the door. "Shoot him if he so much as glances at any one!" he called after them.

"You're damn' tootin'!" Duggan called over his shoulder.

"Natasha, have the commissar put in the second car with Duggan and three soldiers as guard. You and I will take the first car with two of the soldiers. Mischa will act as rear guard with the other four soldiers. Tell every one of the men to go into the kitchen and load up with bread, tea, meat and everything else."

It was quickly done. Out of the kitchen staggered the soldiers, their arms laden with bags of provisions. Davies threw a gold piece into the kitchen door, more

than enough to pay for everything.

"Now, my friends—" he addressed the stupefied crowd at the table—"in case of pursuit, I am afraid it will go very hard with the commissar. I am going to leave two men on guard outside the door. If any one so much as sticks his nose out for twenty-five minutes, he will get a bullet in his head." Turning to the girl at his side—"I'm so sorry to break up your little party," Davies spoke almost regretfully, "but business before pleasure!" He bowed gallantly and kissed her hand.

No one outside the dining room seemed to have noticed anything. He walked out to the street and saw every one in the automobiles. The Mongols grinned at him. The automobiles seemed in excellent shape, all three of them American cars of a well known make.

Urivetsky had gone to sleep, lolling on Duggan's shoulder. The Mongol soldiers watched him like hawks.

From the hotel behind them came not a word.

With a roar of engines the little group of motor cars moved away.

CHAPTER VI

COSSACKS

BESIDE Davies on the rear seat sat Natasha and a Mongol soldier. In front was the driver and another Mongol soldier.

"Head for Kiakhta," ordered Davies.

The driver, a bullet headed Russian, nodded eagerly and turned down a side street, speeding out toward the edge of town, until at last they hit the railroad, following the line of the Trans-Siberian west along the bank of the Khilok.

"Now—" Davies began to figure out their problem—"we have to move straight west along the railroad for nearly a hundred miles. Then we head south for the Mongolian border when we reach Khilot. Kiakhta is on the border. Just before getting to Kiakhta we have to swing around that town as it is liable to be full of Reds. Once around that, we can cross the border into Mongolia. The border is pretty well guarded but, with the strength we have, we should be able to fight our way through. What do you think, Natasha?"

"Very good, except, what will happen when we get into Mongolia? There are no friends there, only Baron Wilhelm von Ungern, and he is liable to welcome us with a firing squad as not."

"We'll have to take a chance on that." He shrugged his shoulders. "Baron Ungern, the unknown quantity."

"He is terrible," shuddered Natasha. "I dread our getting into his power. I have a feeling that we will come to grief in Mongolia."

"You could feel pessimistic about anything, the amount of stuff you have been through." Davies' voice was kindly. "Why don't you curl up, here?" he said in a matter of fact manner. "Put your head on my shoulder and go to sleep; I'll try to keep the bumps from throwing you out of the car."

She smiled gratefully at him and accepted the proffered shoulder. In a very little space of time she was sound asleep, breathing easily and deeply like a child. The car lurched and bounded along through the darkness, now tilted to one side, now nearly capsizing on the other.

Davies wondered how long they would continue before something broke. He counted every minute of riding in the car as so much gained. Inevitably they would have to take horses and the pursuit would start. The thing to do was to put as much distance between themselves and the pursuers as possible.

It was simply a question of endurance and time. If they could make the Mongolian border and get through before the alarm was sounded or before the Reds at Chita had time to reach them—well and good.

He saw the telegraph line strung above them, looping along in careless fashion.

He ordered the car to stop. The whole cavalcade came to a halt. Gently removing Natasha's head from his shoulder

and resting it against the back of the seat, he sought among the Mongol soldiers for one who could speak English. There was one who knew a few words. He sent him up the nearest telegraph pole and saw him cut the wires. This done, the danger of having the country ahead warned against them was obviated; he returned to the car and resumed their progress.

Natasha still slumbered. Their car bumped forward beneath the stars.

The Mongol soldier sat bolt upright at his side, peering ahead, his eyes watching every turn in the road. Davies tried a few Russian words on the man.

The Mongol replied, calling him *noyon* very respectfully. Dimly, from some half forgotten brain recess, he remembered that *noyon* was the Mongol word for prince. So he had been promoted to prince! Not so bad as a starter. Queer country, queer people, something always turning up, something pretty ghastly. Imperceptibly and without knowing it, he slid into a gentle slumber, the Mongol carefully supporting his head with his arm as the bumps jounced the car about, and they sped steadily forward through the night.

DAVIES woke up not knowing how long he had slept. It was Natasha who shielded his head from the bumps in the road and he found the shelter of her arm very welcome. Rubbing his eyes sleepily, he sat bolt upright, confused at having been caught napping. But everything seemed to be going smoothly. The second car was following along and behind that the third. The Mongol soldiers continued to sit bolt upright, staring straight to the front. He wondered whether they were happy at heading toward their own vast plains and steppes.

He asked her how long had he been asleep. Not long, perhaps an hour. Good. There was that much more time gained from pursuit.

"I am sorry we did not bring along those two women," Natasha remarked, apropos of nothing at all.

"Why?" he asked in surprise.

"They should have been killed, those murderesses," she replied.

"Now, now," he reproved, "who is it wants the Russians to stop their little habit of killing each other on every occasion?"

"Yes," she nodded gravely, "but you did not hear them talking to the commissar. Do you know what they asked him?"

"I have a pretty fair idea," he answered.

"Well, the one sitting beside you asked if she might be allowed to shoot you and your friend, Duggan. Then the other one came up and was very angry because she said Duggan was her prey and she wanted to shoot him herself. He asked about me and my brother, and they said let the firing squad take care of us." Natasha's mouth was grim.

Davies started to smile, then quickly repressed it. It was no laughing matter from Natasha's viewpoint, to be thus thrown carelessly to a firing squad while the Americans were killed with special dignity.

"Yes," he admitted, "that was pretty bad. But at that I think they both are cocaine addicts. They seemed like it to me."

"Yes, but a bullet from the gun of a cocaine addict is just as dangerous as any other," she retorted. "I found out that we were shadowed from the minute we got on the train," she went on. "From the moment we set foot on the train to the moment we were brought down to the restaurant there was some one watching us every minute. They have a marvelous organization, those Leopards."

"Why, were those people Leopards?"

"Surely, didn't you know that?" she asked in surprise. "Every one at that table belonged to the Leopards."

"How did you know?"

"Didn't you hear them singing? Oh, of course, you wouldn't understand the words of the song, they were in Russian, but they sang a song that is the Leopard song; it is called the 'Smellers of Blood'

and is a terrible song." She shuddered.

"So-o—" Davies thought for a space, "so we are up against those people. And they have some sort of organization in Mongolia?"

"Mongolia is their headquarters."

"So in addition to the idiosyncrasies of the Bloody Mad Baron we will still have the Leopards around sniffing for our blood?"

"Yes," she nodded gravely, "and they will probably have word to look out for us."

"But the telegraph wires are cut," he announced triumphantly.

She smiled and looked at him pityingly.

"Don't you know that they need no telegraph wires in Mongolia?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Well, it's true. Even now word has come to Mongolia to prepare against your coming. Even now the terrible priests of that society are preparing their weapons against you."

"What kind of weapons?"

"That I do not know. I only know that the ones we have met so far are only lay members. They have no standing in the society; they are not even admitted to its most simple mysteries. All that these know is the pass word and a few signals. They know nothing of the inner workings of the Leopards."

"Who are these people in Mongolia, lamas?"

"That no one knows. Myself, I do not think that they are followers of Paspa."

"Who is Paspa?"

"He was the head of the Yellow Lamas, who finally overthrew and destroyed most of the Red Lamas."

"This gets no clearer every minute." Davies grinned. "As far as I can see the only thing to do in Mongolia is to shoot first and inquire afterwards."

"That is not such a bad system," she admitted after due thought and again he laughed.

The Mongol soldier asked some question of Natasha.

"He wants to know if the *noyon* is hungry, he has brought food for the *noyon*."

"Tell him no, and thank him, we will stop at daylight and make tea and have breakfast."

"I feel wonderful once more," she said after a silence. "I was horribly upset and very weak when my brother did not come back to the room at the hotel. Once I saw him again the relief was so great that I nearly collapsed. It is a terrible thing to have only one person in the world and to cling to that one person so closely."

"But you have another brother?"

"Perhaps. He is probably dead. And in any case he is a stranger to me. No, if I lose Mischa, this brother of mine, life will not be worth the living of it." She stared somberly into the night.

Dark shadows of fir trees stood against the early morning sky. Below them on the left they could catch occasional glints of the waters of the Khilok. Above them on the right ran the twin steel tracks of the Trans-Siberian, its metal ribbons speeding on and on to the Urals and across to European Russia to Moscow and far Petrograd.

"No," Natasha's voice broke on his ears again, "life would be little worth the living."

The dim lights and the huddled shadows of buildings warned them that they were coming into Taidut, a small town on the railroad.

Davies immediately grew alert, leaning forward in his seat, watching every shadow and every light in the village before them. But their cars swept through the silent streets without rousing a soul. In a moment they were beyond and in the open country again. Davies breathed a sigh of relief and leaned back. Their enemies had not yet caught up with them.

DAYLIGHT was beginning to show in the east. The first rays of the rising sun splashed the sky with gold and turquoise and amber. They had to travel another fifty miles before getting away from the line of the railroad and turning south toward Mongolia.

The first rays of the rising sun showed

them the dome shaped black *yurtas* of wandering Buriats crowded on the side of the road. Davies bestirred himself.

"Let's stop here and have breakfast," he suggested.

Natasha translated his wishes to the chauffeur. The Mongol soldier sitting with them shook his head violently and pointed to the *yurtas*. Natasha followed his pointing finger and nodded.

"No," she announced, "we can not stop here; see the flags!"

Davies saw some triangular red and yellow flags on the tops of the *yurtas*. Before several of them he saw a cap on a high pole.

"They are afflicted with sickness," explained Natasha. "The flags mean that. The caps mean that the lord and master of that *yurta* has died."

"Smallpox?" inquired Davies.

"Smallpox," replied Natasha.

They went on.

The Mongolian soldier began to speak to Natasha. Question and answer flashed back and forth across Davies. Finally Natasha spoke in English.

"Our guard is a personage himself. He is a Khodja of the Great Horde, a Bearer of the Tamga, the great seal of his tribe," she announced simply.

Davies listened and looked curiously at the mahogany features of the Mongol. Something free and high and self-reliant about the man's pose showed him to be above the ordinary and made Davies reflect on the background of such as he, who had succeeded to a heritage of wild nomad ancestry, generations of free thinking, hard riding forbears who had at one time overrun nearly the whole known world.

And this man was a Kirghez, whose high cheekbones showed the mingled blood of all the Turko-Mongol peoples, world conquerors, shepherds—men who in their day had reshaped Asia. To Davies he was like the memories evoked by an ancient ruin in the desert, like the faint remembered savor of an old tale, like the dreams brought forth by a half buried inscription in the waste, sole witness to the tale of an ancient glory long dead.

Attempt was now being made to resurrect that old glory. Under the Soviets the Tartar, Bashkir, Kirghez and Uzbeg Republics were declared. These nomads were granted a certain degree of representative government. Best of all, the steady encroachments of the Cossacks had been stopped and they were allowed to increase and multiply. Of all these things did Davies think as he watched his companion, watching him so closely that he was startled when a hoarse honking of horns came from the rear.

Looking back he saw the chauffeur of the second car waving madly from far in the rear where he had stopped. Backing up their own car, they ran alongside the second car. It had a flat tire.

Urivetsky had awakened at last and was looking upon the whole proceedings with a jaundiced eye.

"What are you doing?" he inquired haughtily of Davies.

"Oh, just traveling," Davies replied pleasantly.

Davies looked around. Mischa was trying to attract his attention.

"May I kill him?" begged the young Russian officer.

"Sorry—" Davies shook his head—"but it simply isn't being done while I'm running the show."

Urivetsky's voice interrupted. His tone was haughty and commanding.

"You had better release me immediately," he threatened, "or it will go hard with you when finally my men catch up with us."

"Yes—" Davies' voice was quite mild—"I have a friend here who wants to release you immediately."

"Quite right!" Urivetsky's voice was pompous and assertive. "I will see that he is rewarded for his good sense."

"Yes," Davies went on quietly, "he wants to release you with a pistol bullet. Of course if you prefer that—" Davies shrugged his shoulders.

Urivetsky turned pale. He looked past Davies to where Mischa fingered his re-

volver threateningly. Suddenly the red bearded commissar lost all his air of assurance.

"I call upon you," his voice quavered, "to see that I am treated with all the honors of war," and he looked pleadingly at Davies.

"Honors! War!" Davies snorted. "You are speaking of things of which you know nothing, you dirty killer of unarmed prisoners. It isn't because I think that you are deserving of any decency that I am protecting you; it is because of my own conscience, a word that would probably require some translating for you to understand," and Davies, looking at the quaking hulk of the man, contemptuously turned away.

The tire was fixed. The cavalcade resumed its onward progress.

AFTER another hour's travel they entered the street of a town, the town of Khilok, their turning off place to head southward to Mongolia. A pistol was pressed firmly and none too gently into the side of Urivetsky. He made no sign or sound to show that all was not well. Two pink hatted Chekists barred their way as they turned down the main and only street of the town.

Mischa spoke to them sharply. The two, seeing the red stars and triangles on the uniforms of the Mongol guards, seeing the Cheka uniforms on the two, Mischa and Natasha, bowed politely and saluted, waving the travelers to go on.

The motors started up noisily. The first car moved out slowly. The second had some trouble in starting. Davies had his car slow down, waiting. Far down the railroad track they heard the hum of an approaching train, coming from the direction of Chita.

The train pulled into the station. The second automobile stood in place, the chauffeur working and fussing over the engine. Down the track two cars of the train seemed to erupt soldiers. They swarmed out of their shelter and lined up rapidly on the side of the track. Davies watched the motions of the second chauffeur narrowly. The fellow was deliberate in his movements. He seemed to be glancing out of the corner of his eyes at the train.

On the platform the soldiers had been faced about and were marching towards them, led by a tall officer in the Red uniform. Davies jumped swiftly out of the rear seat. Running to the rear, he drew his arm back. As he came up to the chauffeur of the second car, still puttering about the engine, he let drive the whole weight of his body and knocked the man down.

The engine was running.

Jumping into the driver's seat, Davies quickly set the auto in motion. Waving to Natasha to go on, he followed the machine ahead. As the three automobiles disappeared down the road a scattering volley of rifle fire followed, the bullets knocking down leaves and twigs in the road beside them.

"Pretty close," Davies called over his shoulder to Duggan who sat beside the red bearded commissar.

"Red whiskers here has been passin' the time o' day with the chauffeur," explained Duggan, "but I give him a little jolt on the jaw that'll make him keep his tongue between his teeth."

Urivetsky held his face in his cupped hand, nursing a bruise on his chin.

"Look here, Urivetsky," Duggan spoke to him with a significant look, "fun's fun, but keep the baby's feet out of the soup. Next time you shoot off your face you're gonna get some real sleepin' powders, yes, sir, you're goin' to wake up in Bolsheviki heaven—get that?" Duggan's voice grated in no pleasant manner. Urivetsky got it; he was frightened and humble.

The going was rough after turning away from Khilkot, until at last they came to the caravan route running south from near Lake Baikal. This was the old tea route, used for generations by the caravans coming up from Kalgan across the Gobi to Urga and thence north to Siberia.

In their rear all seemed to be quiet. It was evident that they could not be caught

as long as their machines held out, there being few automobiles in Siberia. Again they ran into telegraph wires and again Davies had them cut. There was no use allowing word to precede them.

From the sun's position, Davies figured that it must be about nine in the morning when finally they came to the first of the post stations which border the road to Urga.

HE STOPPED his little column of cars and went in, accompanied by Natasha, to demand refreshment. An old Buriat and his wife were keepers of this post station, a typical Russian affair, a large *izba* of squared logs chinked with moss and mud, the inside, carefully whitewashed, consisting of two rooms, one for guests and the other for the family of the post station master. Here they had tea and black bread and meat, immensely welcome after the all night ride.

The half naked Buriat children watched them, fascinated. Davies was surprised to find an American sewing machine of a very well known make in this out of the way place, also surprised to find a big calendar, several years old, of a New York insurance company. But it seemed that the old Buriat had a very vague idea of America, being perfectly sure in his own mind that it was one of the distant possessions of Soviet Russia, far away toward the sea somewhere.

The wife of the Buriat was part Russian, and rather comely, wearing the felt boots and silver and turquoise ornaments of the Buriat women. In one corner of the main room was an icon, in another a clay statue of Buddha. Evidently there was some sort of a family compromise on religion.

They spent little time at the post station. Davies kept an anxious eye toward the rear. He found that the cars had a plentiful supply of reserve gas, and extra tires. Natasha talked long and earnestly with the old Buriat as they drank their tea.

Starting once more, Davies found that Mischa could drive and he turned over to him the second car, resuming his place in the first machine with Natasha.

Without any preamble she started in.

"The Mad Baron Ungern is fighting through Mongolia. He has a colonel, a Colonel Kazigrandi out somewhere near the border, and Colonel Kazigrandi is being pressed backward by a large force of Chinese and Bolsheviki. They are between us and Urga. It will not be long before we run into some of their forces. Also there is a force of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks who used to be stationed at a town ahead of us, Troitsk-Kosavsk. Some of them are Reds and some of them are Whites; no one seems to know which side they belong to; evidently they are freebooters fighting any one who is weak enough. But we will have to watch out for them."

Davies listened thoughtfully. He spoke as if thinking aloud.

"Reds behind us, uncertain Kazaki before us, Reds in front of them, and Baron Ungern troops after that. Aside from that we will have little trouble getting through the two hundred miles between here and Kiakhta and the two hundred miles more to Urga, four hundred miles of nice pleasant going!"

"Yes," she answered seriously, "it may be very nice going but it is, what do you say, a little uncertain!"

And uncertain it started to be. For they had not gone ten miles before the sharp crackle of rifle fire ahead apprised them of the fact that things were stirring in this section of the country. Davies slowed up his car as the firing became louder, and quietly and slowly they came to a cross-road. A group of led horses were standing there under charge of a Cossack non-commissioned officer and several men, shaggy, wild looking fellows, their lances standing upright in the soft earth.

Davies looked at these men. They were brilliantly garbed, wearing the yellow striped breeches and red blouses of the Siberian Cossacks. Their Cossack *kubanki*, or caps, were of velvet trimmed with astrakhan fur. They stared sus-

piciously at the motor caravan. Two of them conferred together, then rode up to Davies' car.

Ahead Davies could hear shouts and yells and the increased noise of the firing.

The Cossacks spoke to him. Natasha answered. A long colloquy in rapid fire Russian followed. Finally the Cossacks smiled.

"They say," Natasha turned and translated, "that they are fighting a Red detachment just ahead. They say that if we will go forward with our cars and start firing, the Reds will think that heavy reinforcements have come and will retreat. In that case the Cossacks would be very glad to escort us to the border and on to Urga, as they wish to join Baron Ungern."

"Ask them how many are in their party," directed Davies.

Natasha posed the question. The Cossacks answered promptly.

"Fifty or sixty men," stated Natasha after listening and asking several more questions.

"All right," Davies agreed, "tell them we'll go ahead and help drive their enemies away."

Again there was a rapid interchange of question and answer. The Cossacks nodded enthusiastically. One of them swung out of the saddle and took position on the running board of Davies' car.

THE CAVALCADE moved forward. Around another turn in the road was a line of Cossacks stretched across the way, dismounted and firing steadily to the front. Davies stopped the car and got out to reconnoiter.

He found their commander, a young officer with gaunt cheekbones and serious steady eyes, watching the enemy through field glasses. Natasha, who followed, interpreted for the American. The Cossack officer bowed, handed over the field glasses and pointed to a meadow about five hundred yards ahead. Little could be seen in the field. Davies saw a brown figure rise and rush back into a woods to the rear. At the place where the brown figure had risen he saw other prone figures stretched on the grass. Through the glass he saw that the Cossacks at his feet were firing wildly, little spots of dust arising far in the rear of the Bolsheviki.

Davies went forward, knelt down and examined the sights of the nearest rifles. As he had figured, their sights were set too high; the three or four that he examined showed ranges from one thousand to two thousand meters.

The Russian officer spoke no English.

"Tell him that his men are firing too high," Davies asked Natasha. "If he'll have them lower their sights he'll begin to hit something. Davies estimated the distance swiftly and gave the correct range in meters.

The Russian nodded and went down the line of his men. Each man, as the officer came opposite his position, ceased firing and reset his sights. Davies watched through his glasses.

The corrected rifles began to show results immediately.

"Tell him to call up his horses at once and pursue," directed Davies. "He's got them on the run!"

The Russian officer shouted toward the rear. A thunder of galloping hoofs and his horses were boiling around him, men were mounting up jubilantly, lances were set in rest. Davies climbed into his car, the Mongol soldiers eagerly alert. The whole force moved forward, the Cossacks yelling exultantly ahead, the three cars bringing up the rear.

They rapidly crossed the open ground. Ahead the retreat had become a stampede. A large squad of the Cossacks debouched into the field, galloping across to where the brown figures were fleeing. The horsemen speared the fleeing men, charging them with the lance and then sped on, disengaging the steel lance head as they galloped by. The remainder of the Cossack troop hurried on ahead, cutting off the retreat of the Reds through the woods and slaughtering many of them as they sought shelter among the trees.

The whole attacking force moved forward for twenty minutes before the Cossacks, their steel lanceheads dripping red, began to assemble on the road again, singing and yelling.

They crowded around Davies' car, waving their *kubanka* and shouting many words which he could not understand.

"They are saying that you brought them luck," Natasha translated. "They want you to continue with them."

Davies smiled at the enthusiastic Cossacks who pressed around the car, shaking their lances and shouting until he could scarcely get through the press.

He stopped the car and called to the officer. The serious, steady eyed, rather gaunt young officer came up and saluted ceremoniously. He spoke to Natasha at great length while all the Cossacks listened. As he finished they hurrahed in approbation.

"He says," Natasha said to Davies, "that he is a very young officer of these Cossacks. They have lost their ataman and he would like very much if the American would ride with them and advise them, for they have many enemies ahead."

"All right," Davies replied. "Ask them how many cartridges they have."

Natasha posed the question. There was a rapid fire of answers.

"Not very much," admitted Natasha, "some have twenty, thirty pieces of ammunition, some have fifty."

"Tell them to go back and collect all the cartridges from the bodies of the Bolsheviki, bring them to me and I will distribute them. Also bring all the rifles and belts."

The Cossacks nodded vigorously in approval, looking at each other as much as to say that their judgment had been good and straightway they galloped off. In a few minutes they returned with many bandoleers of ammunition and about thirty rifles which they deposited in a pile by the side of Davies' car.

This ammunition, which amounted to at least two thousand rounds, was distributed. The rifles were placed in the cars. Then a great hubbub arose. Several of the Cossacks pointed at the red bearded Urivetsky seated in the second car.

"They want to be allowed to kill the commissar," translated Natasha, her eyes gleaming in approval.

Three of the Cossacks reached down and started to drag the white faced and frightened looking Bolshevik from the car. Davies shouted at them.

"*Nyet!* No!" his voice rang out angrily.

The Cossacks looked at him, stupified. Such conduct was incomprehensible to their simple minds. Why here was a helpless enemy, a prisoner and there was this queer foreigner objecting to immediate justice!

"Tell them I will shoot the first man who lays hands on my prisoner," Davies spoke in no uncertain tone, and brought his pistol forth to reinforce the argument.

Natasha translated. The Cossacks edged away. But there was vast approval in their eyes. Why this strange person wanted to cherish a living Bolshevik was more than they could fathom, but they liked and approved his authoritative voice and the threat of death that he had made. Yes, undoubtedly he was a commander. They wagged their heads in approval and sat around waiting for further orders like willing hounds, their tongues hanging out.

Davies issued an order. The chauffeur of the other car was brought up to him.

"Find out from these men whether they are willing to go on with us as chauffeurs," Davies asked Natasha, indicating both the chauffeurs. There was a long conversation.

"They say that they want to stay with us, they only drove for the Bolsheviki because they were forced to. They would like to join the White forces."

"Good. We'll issue them each a rifle and bandoleer of ammunition. Now tell the Cossacks that I want them to take charge of Urivetsky, warning them that he is to be brought in safely. He may come in handy as a hostage later on, but

I want him out of the car so that we can replace him with a rifleman."

It was no sooner said than done. Urivetsky, looking very frightened, was put on a horse and bound, while a Cossack was placed in charge of him. The Cossack soldier whose horse had been preempted, took the commissar's place in the car. Davies had rifles issued to himself, to Duggan, to Natasha and Mischa and the two chauffeurs. When the task was completed he had a force of fifteen effective rifles in three cars, with plenty of ammunition.

"Now tell the Cossacks to get extra horses for us and lead them so that we can mount up in case of anything happening to the cars; we'll need fifteen horses," Natasha translated, "and tell them that we will go on ahead, reconnoitering. If we run into a fight we'll wait for them."

Davies started forth with his column of cars, the Cossacks waving cheerfully after them as they straightened out in column of twos and set their horses at the trot.

THEY had soon left the mounted men far to the rear and sped along the road. Duggan was in the forward car with Natasha and Davies. Mischa drove the rear car.

"We kinda joined the Motor Transport Corps," commented Duggan. "Me, I'd like to wrap my legs around a horse once more. I savvy them better than I do these here tin cockroaches."

"Don't worry, you'll get your fill of horses soon enough," comforted Davies.

They passed through some deserted and burned villages. In a clearing beyond one village they saw ten bodies hanging to trees, the bodies of some White officers who had been captured in attempting to escape after the Kolchak debacle.

"Nice people," growled Duggan. "What's the good o' killin' everybody that has a different brand of politics than what you've got? Does that get you anywhere?"

Natasha agreed with him absently, then turned to Davies, "There are a lot of Reds between here and the border," she stated. "The Cossacks say that there is a large Bolshevik detachment of Buriats under two leaders, Galinow and Batueff, somewhere between here and Kiakhta."

"How large a detachment?"

"They say about three hundred men. Also beyond them is another Bolshevist force which is fighting against Colonel Kazigrandi on the border. They say that Colonel Kazigrandi has been driven back and is fighting somewhere around Van Kure."

"Colonel Kazigrandi is commanding one of Baron Ungern's detachments?" asked Davies.

"Yes, and he is fighting against the Chinese as well. The Chinese are helping the Bolsheviki. They have surrendered many White officers to the Reds."

The morning was getting well advanced; it was about time for something to eat. They rounded the corner of a hill and came down into a small valley in which nestled the log houses of a village. Near the road stood the post station. From far away they saw three or four horses tied outside this. As they approached, several men came out and, mounting quickly, galloped swiftly away.

"Shall we chase them babies?" asked Duggan.

"Let them go—probably some travelers frightened by our numbers," Davies replied.

"Or a Bolsheviki scouting detachment," grumbled Duggan.

CHAPTER VII

DISCIPLINE

THEY entered the whitewashed guest room and demanded tea from the old Russian who kept the place. As they stepped inside a wizened old Chinese seated near the window rose up and bowed, his eyes expressionless. The man had peculiarly lifeless looking eyes, rather opaque and staring, such eyes as Lazarus might have had when he returned from the dead.

"Sort of a cold boiled gooseberry eye," remarked Duggan.

Davies was taking few chances. He sent one of the Mongols to the farther edge of the village as sentinel. He and Duggan went out munching at their black bread and kept an eye on the road to the rear and watched the houses of the village closely as they chatted with Natasha who remained in the car.

They returned from their vigil to get some more tea. When they entered the room again they found that the Chinese had disappeared.

They searched the rear room but could find no trace of the old fellow. The Russian who kept the place denied all knowledge of the disappearance, seeming exceedingly frightened as he talked. Davies found one of the Mongols who had finished his tea and bread and sent him to relieve the sentinel at the far end of the village.

The man disappeared around the edge of the road. He had barely gone out of sight when he suddenly reappeared, waving his arms and running, shouting something in an excited voice.

"He says the sentinel has been murdered!" Natasha called.

Davies waved to the nearest men to follow and ran down the road, followed by Mischa and Duggan and several of the Mongols.

There on the side of the road, flat on his face, his arms outstretched, lay the body of the sentinel, a knife wound in his back. Davies scattered his men and searched the nearest houses. They were deserted. There was no sign of a living thing about them. He examined the body. The man's back was naked, his blouse ripped off by his murderer.

Davies rose in surprise.

"Do you notice that?" He pointed out to Duggan another wound on the shoulder. It was not exactly a wound as further study showed, it was a mark cut into the flesh. It was the same mark that they had seen on the man killed at Chita, having all the appearance of a crude swastika; this swastika, like the other one, was reversed, turning counter clockwise.

Natasha had come up by now. She looked at the mark and nodded.

"Yes, it is the same. We are being followed." She stared around searchingly.

"What can it mean?" Davies looked on the circle of puzzled faces around him. They went slowly back to the post house, watching narrowly for further signs of attack. The forest around them was as silent as a tomb. There was not a movement of life in the village. After making arrangements with the Russian to dispose of the body, they left the place, silent and depressed by this second mysterious assassination.

THE MONGOL soldier in their car spoke to Natasha in his guttural tongue. She listened, interested, and nodded.

"He says it is a powerful devil that has killed his comrade, a devil that lives in Mongolia. He says that it will strike again. It always strikes three times as a warning before some awful punishment. He says that one more of this party is doomed to die, before the awful punishment is inflicted on all. He says that we have offended this devil in some way. He says that there are many devils in Mongolia."

"I'd like to offend this particular devil with a .45 bullet!" Duggan growled vengefully. "Stabbin' a man in the back!"

"What I don't get," mused Davies, "is this swastika sign turned backwards. Funny whoever it was should use that sign—the real swastika is so important a symbol of the Buddhists. Are there any sects opposed to the lamas in Mongolia?" he asked Natasha.

"No-o," she replied uncertainly, "there are the Yellow Lamas, members of the Ge-lug-pa, or Virtuous Order, the followers of Paspa. They control the Tibetan and Mongolian church. Then there are the Red Caps who are of the old unreformed Buddhism. I have heard that

there is a remnant of the old pagan religion still existing, the religion called Bòn, the Black Caps, whose followers are called Bönpa; they worship devils, Dre, and are snake worshippers as well, giving obedience to Naga, the snake god. But whether they still exist I do not know."

"Do you know anything about the Chinese secret societies and whether they operate in Mongolia?"

She shook her head.

"But I will try to find out," she promised.

Ahead of them close to a meadow stood a small log house surrounded with the usual wall. As their cars sped toward it they saw several men break from the house and run toward the meadow in the rear. This time Davies decided to give chase. The speed of the cars was increased. They swept up to the log house.

Davies and Duggan jumped out, followed by the Mongol soldiers.

Davies nearly stumbled over a deep ditch which cut across the field. Cowered down in the ditch were three men, scantily clad, barefoot and miserable looking, but they were white men.

He covered them with his pistol and motioned to them to come out. They filed out, dread in their eyes.

"Ask them who they are and what they are doing," he called to Natasha.

She questioned the three. They replied sullenly. The spokesman was a black bearded, wiry looking man who seemed to have more courage than the others.

A look of vast relief suddenly spread over their faces as Natasha spoke. Suddenly, without a word of warning, the nearest man, a hollow eyed, thin, sick looking creature, grasped Davies' hand and kissed it. Embarrassed, he stepped back.

"What is it all about?" he asked Natasha.

"This is Lieutenant-Colonel Metchnikoff, Captain Soldanoff and Captain Bezrensky, all of them former officers in the Russian army. They have escaped from the Reds and have been hiding here in the woods. They thought that we were Reds and that they were to be shot—"

The black bearded tall one interrupted, pointing off toward the woods.

"He says that he and his two companions came out of hiding to secure food for their comrades who are still back there in the woods. He wants to know if we can't help them get to Mongolia."

"Ask him how many there are," directed Davies.

"He says that there are eighteen more of them back in the woods."

They awaited Davies word.

He, thoughtful, reached in his pocket and drew forth a cigaret case. Taking out a cigaret, he tapped it absently against his thumb, then lighted it. Suddenly he noticed the look of positive longing in the eyes of the ragged Russian officer. Very quickly he offered the man his cigaret case, and extended it to the two others as well. Their faces looked beatified with the enjoyment of the smoke as they lighted the cigarets and inhaled.

"They have had nothing to smoke for a month," explained Natasha.

Davies' mind was made up.

"Tell them to bring their friends out here and we will allow them to join our party. But tell them first that they must obey orders. We will never get to Mongolia with twenty or thirty bosses."

Natasha translated. The Russians acceded joyfully. Turning about they ran across the field, waving and shouting.

Out of the woods appeared a ragged group of men.

"Looks like Coxey's army," snorted Duggan.

"But they are all white men, and they can add some strength to our forces," explained Davies.

The Russians approached their comrades, who explained the situation. There were signs of great rejoicing among them. That group of twenty-one men had only one revolver and only ten rounds of ammunition for that.

In the rear of the third car were the rifles and ammunition captured from the Reds by the Cossacks. Davies issued

them to the new men. They accepted them gratefully, unconsciously straightening out their bent frames with the new pride engendered by the weapons.

They were furnished with bread and meat and they munched it almost wolfishly. The last touch was the issue of a handful of cigarets to every man. The whole operation had not consumed more than twenty-five minutes. At the end of those twenty-five minutes, where there had been a whipped and beaten mob of broken spirited men, there now stood a well knit group of courageous fighters.

Davies looked them over approvingly. Several of them spoke English. He learned that ahead about three miles was the encampment of a detachment of Bolsheviki, who had been harassing the country side. There were from fifty to sixty men in the Red forces. They were mounted and well equipped.

"How about getting some horses from them?" Davies asked casually.

The Russians looked startled, then suddenly they nodded, smiling. They turned to their companions and spoke to them in their own tongue. A pleased chuckle went up from the group. They grasped their rifles, ready and willing.

TAKING all that could be accommodated safely on the running boards of the three cars, Davies moved forward slowly with his group, the men on the ground trotting alongside until they were winded, when they exchanged places with the men on the foot boards. They were enabled in this manner to make a fair rate of speed.

It was not long until the Russians informed Davies that they were close to the Red detachment which occupied an old Cossack post at the entrance of a village. Running the cars up among the trees hidden from view, Davies left a small guard with them. He brought his men in single file up to the edge of the woods which bordered the village. From the leafy screen of the trees, he saw the old Cossack station not three hundred yards away. A few men in shirt sleeves were seated, smoking, on the porch of the building. Close to its walls were tethered the horses, some forty animals.

"Part of the detachment must be out on a foray," he reasoned.

The thing was to get the Reds away from the shelter of the building.

He explained his plans rapidly to the Russians.

"*Da! Da!*" they nodded vigorously.

Lining up his detachment in concealment at the edge of the trees, he beckoned to three of the most ragged of his new men. These left their rifles and ammunition and disappeared in the woods.

Tense and breathless, Davies watched the enemy. They showed no sign of alarm. Certainly they were far from danger, as they thought, in this out of way place. They had no sentinels posted.

There was a crackle of brush and a shout at the edge of the woods about a hundred yards up the field. The Reds on the porch of the building looked up, startled. Out of the woods ran the three ragged officers, looking behind them fearfully.

The Bolsheviki took in the scene immediately. A shout went up from them. The three officers ran out into the field like scared rabbits and turned, running away, parallel to the woods.

The Bolsheviki were galvanized into sudden action. They poured out of the building and streamed across the field after the fugitives, their blood lust up. Some carried carbines and some went bare handed, but all were possessed with the idea of capturing and killing the White fugitives.

They were strung along the field like a pack of hounds in full cry, running directly across the front of the concealed riflemen at the edge of the woods. The Russians and Mongols looked pleadingly at Davies. His hand went up. When the last Red had flung himself out of the house he dropped his hand.

A hail of well directed fire at close range struck the Reds. They began to drop. Men flung up their hands and

pitched face down without ever knowing what hit them. Others got one horrified view of the line of men in the edge of the woods before they expired. Still others, wounded, crawled into holes and behind hillocks. The force was nearly wiped out.

Davies signaled to cease the firing. He had some difficulty in making himself heard and had to run down the line in some cases, knocking up the rifle barrels. His men rose.

At a dog trot in single file the detachment swarmed across the field and into the building. One or two Reds came out and were immediately captured. The place was otherwise bare of men.

There was great laughter and rejoicing and many admiring glances cast at Davies, who had captured the place without the loss of a single man. The three who had been sent forth as a decoy returned to receive the congratulations of their comrades.

Davies immediately organized the place for security and defense. The cars were sent for. A guard was formed. Lieutenant-Colonel Metchnikoff was placed in charge of the guard. Davies directed him to place sentinels at the most strategic points.

The tall, dark bearded Russian received his instructions rather sullenly, Davies thought at the time, but he paid little attention to the matter. Later it troubled his mind.

He decided to await the coming of the Cossacks who were following him up from the rear. He reasoned that they should arrive some time that night, knowing the speed he had made and knowing how the small Cossack ponies were capable of traveling.

The Bolshevists were well supplied with food, ammunition and clothing. The ragged men of Davies' outfit quickly found themselves boots and blouses, sabers and revolvers, taking them from the supplies they found in the house, from the prisoners and the bodies of the dead. Only one wounded man survived the attack. He was given such care as was possible and made comfortable, but he died before many hours had passed. The four or five prisoners were set to work under guard, preparing the evening meal and getting firewood.

LATE that evening the sentinels warned Davies of the approach of a body of mounted men. They turned out to be the Cossacks, and they came riding in, cheering loudly when they discovered what had taken place. Forming rank beyond the light of the fires they rode up, and dipped their lances in a salute to Davies as he stood on the steps of the house.

The long line of tossing horses' heads, the shaggy hatted men, wild and picturesque, the keen sparkle of the firelight on the steel lance points and the whistling ripple of the pennons as they dipped swiftly in the salute made an exceedingly colorful picture.

They broke ranks and unsaddled. That night around the fires the voices of the Cossacks were raised in song. Who has never heard the wild and tuneful voice of Cossacks singing their native songs around a camp-fire has still an experience to enjoy.

Davies, observing closely, noticed that a little group of officers with Lieutenant-Colonel Metchnikoff, kept to themselves, whispering together, and avoided the Cossacks. The remainder of the twenty-one officers who had joined them that day fraternized around the camp-fires and raised their voices in song with the best of them.

"We're kinda collecting a real sure enough army," commented Duggan. "Let's see, we got blame near ninety in this outfit now. We sure oughtn't to have to worry about breakin' through the Reds with all these."

As he spoke Lieutenant-Colonel Metchnikoff strode up to Davies. Natasha drifted over to see what was up. The Russian waved his arms and talked excitedly.

Natasha attempted to argue with him. Finally, shrugging her shoulders, she turned to Davies.

"He says that he does not see why he has been kept on guard so long, and treated like a common soldier. He says that he is a lieutenant-colonel and that his rank is deserving of more dignity. He says that—"

"Ask him what he is lieutenant-colonel of," Davies' voice broke in quietly.

Natasha translated. The Russian drew himself up proudly and made some reply.

"He says that he is lieutenant-colonel of the Ismailovsky Guard Regiment."

"Tell him," Davies said, his voice very gentle, "that I have no objection to his joining the Ismailovsky Guard Regiment immediately."

Natasha translated this, her face serious. The Russian looked at her, his eyes incredulous. He started to protest, then Davies' meaning came to him. He made some sort of an awkward salute and shambled away.

"What's the joke, Major?" asked Duggan who saw a grin spread over Davies' face.

"Well, he got the point," replied Davies.

"What was the point." Duggan was curious.

"You see the Ismailovsky Guard Regiment was one of the first regiments blotted out by the Bolsheviki. There is no such regiment; they're all scattered or dead."

But the leaven of sullenness works rapidly in a command.

THE NEXT morning Davies set about organizing the expedition to move on. The extra equipment and food was packed on the cars. The horses were allotted to the dismounted men. The force was divided into three platoons. Davies noticed an increase in the sullenness of the detachment of which the lieutenant-colonel of the Ismailovsky Guard Regiment was a member. On several occasions when Davies directed some of these men to do something, they first conferred with Metchnikoff before carrying out his orders. Davies said nothing.

His silence was taken as encouragement. The Cossacks were very quickly ready for the march. The group of officers headed by the lieutenant-colonel seemed to dawdle purposely. Finally they were ready.

Davies assigned them a position in the rear of the Cossack detachment.

Metchnikoff rode out angrily from the ranks. Davies was standing. Metchnikoff was mounted. In any army it is customary for the mounted man to dismount before addressing his commander. Davies turned his back on the irate and excited lieutenant-colonel.

Duggan's face grew red and angry.

"Tell that bird to come down off o' that horse before I knock his block off," he called.

There was no mistaking the menace in his voice and attitude. Metchnikoff dismounted.

"What is it all about?" asked Davies quietly.

Natasha translated.

"He says that he refuses to ride in the rear of the column, that he and his men are officers and that they will not ride behind soldiers."

Davies turned swiftly. His voice rang out.

"Do I understand that he is refusing to obey orders?"

Natasha nodded.

Davies turned to Duggan; he pointed to the Mongol soldiers.

"Seize this man, take him down there at the edge of the woods and have him shot!" his voice admitted of no argument. The rank of men before him understood the gesture. They saw the Mongols seize the blustering Metchnikoff; they saw the lieutenant-colonel's face suddenly pale; they saw Duggan lead the firing squad, Metchnikoff a prisoner in its midst, toward the wood. All was still for a space. They heard in the tense silence the crash of a volley. Many of them crossed themselves. But they all sat up straighter in their saddles.

What they did not see was Davies' left eye flutter as he issued his orders to

Sergeant Duggan. Nor did they see Duggan striving mightily to repress a grin as he returned and saluted.

"He ran like all the devils in Mongolia was after him," confided Duggan later. "When I cut loose with that volley in the air he fair' leaped off the ground and lit streaking it for parts unknown."

Natasha, who believed the worst, smiled sweetly on Davies. The men in the ranks beamed on him, so pleased were they. They rejoiced in what the Russian loves, a hard fisted boss. Not for a moment had Davies forgotten the words of the young ataman of the Ussuri Cossacks: "The Russian must be ruled with a rod of iron; they obey only the knout."

Whatever the truth in that statement, Davies certainly was in command of a disciplined organization from that moment.

He called to the young officer of the Cossacks, and that officer leaped from his horse. He marched briskly up to Davies and saluted, standing at attention, his arm and shoulders fairly trembling with the intensity of the strained position that he assumed.

Davies gave him his orders; again he saluted, about faced and marched back to his men. Once there he barked an order at them.

With the suddenness of the breaking into full tongue of a pack of hounds in the dead of night, that force lined up in a long rank before Davies, broke into the long drawn, shouting salute of the Russian army, the salute that sounds like the steady barking of a huge pack. There was something joyous and heartfelt about that salute, as if this group of wandering and none too capable men found a master at last, a master whom they could trust to lead them to safety.

In order to conserve oil and gas he directed that one of the cars be abandoned. It was stripped of oil and gas and extra tires and spare parts and left behind. He, Duggan, Mischa and Natasha took to horseback. The cars were placed under the charge of one of the officers and directed to follow. The prisoners were released, and immediately applied to join the force. They were allowed to enlist.

At last came the order to move. The column was set in motion. Down the road it went, nearly ninety horsemen, riding along two by two, carrying what seemed to be a small forest of lances, the pennons whipping in the crisp morning breeze.

Obedient, the Cossack officer had sent out advance and rear guards. The old soldiers among the Cossacks nodded in deep approval. Here was something they understood.

Davies, for all his joy at once more feeling a horse between his knees, stared ahead seriously. He had learned that there were many difficulties to be overcome before winning to Urga, that distant and mysterious city of the lamas. They had first to fight their way through the encompassing bands of Reds that were located between this point and the border. They had secondly to fight their way through still other bands that patrolled the border. After that came the uncertainties of the Chinese and at last the great uncertainty of Baron Ungern, that exceedingly temperamental madman, who always shot first and inquired later.

ON THE line of march lay the town of Troitsk-Kosavsk, said to be the headquarters of a large force of Buriats under Bolshevist control.

"'Bout this here Ungerner—" Duggan rode alongside—"far's I can gather that there bird won't guarantee nobody nothin' but a decent burial. They say all his officers carries poison so they can kill themselves in case he decides to have them beaten to death. I been talkin' to one or two o' these guys that knows him."

"Why do his officers and men serve him?"

"If I could answer that question, Major, I could answer the question, 'Why is a Russian?' Why does them birds fall for that stuff we pulled this morning? They sure got me puzzled." Duggan shrugged his shoulders.

The small Cossack horses were going

forward steadily at the gait for which they are famous, a gait that carries them almost unbelievable distances in all sorts of weather and under all sorts of privation.

"Sure can't hand 'em much on their saddles." Duggan looked down unfavorably on the high pommeled Cossack saddle with its large rolls of leather.

"They're not so bad when you get used to them," Davies suggested.

"Yes, sir, like the Irishman said about gettin' killed, it ain't so bad when you get used to it," and Duggan shook his head morosely.

"Duggan, I'm afraid you're losing the resiliency and adaptability of youth," Davies said seriously.

"I'm losin' worse than that, I'm losin' the seat off my pants bouncin' around in this here trick saddle," Duggan admitted, refusing to be cheerful.

Down along the column swept a song, the song of happy warriors, a famous old Cossack song about Yermak, the Cossack conqueror of Siberia. It was lifted on strong voices in the morning air but only succeeded in rousing Duggan's ire.

"They'll bring every Bolsheviki son of a gun and his brother down around our ears with that ki-yoodlin'," he criticized.

"The advance guard is well out forward. If it makes them happy to sing let them sing."

"If they could fight like they do this grand opera oratorio stuff they'd sure clean up on everything they tackled," Duggan went on.

"What makes you think they can't fight?" asked Davies curious.

"Have you seen their guns?" Duggan's face was contorted with all the disgust of a man whose nose suddenly has been assailed with a vile odor.

"Yes, pretty dirty," Davies nodded.

"Dirty is right; I never seen such a lookin' mess o' dirt."

"Tell you what, Duggan, tonight you gather them around in a ring and get them to clean up their equipment."

"Sure enough, Major, can I?" Duggan's face fairly beamed.

"Yes, now how about taking a ride up forward and seeing if the advance guard is on the job."

Duggan nodded, put his horse into a gallop, and disappeared up the road ahead.

The steady drumming of horses' hoofs, the deep voiced singing of the Cossacks behind him, the cheerful clink and rattle of bit and spur and saber made a lulling symphony that helped Davies relax from the strain he had been under for the past few days. The road was as silent and free from wayfarers as if a destroying army had passed that way, as if indeed the pale horse of Death itself had galloped silently through these woods and fields. Certainly the Four Horsemen had harassed Russia past all imagining, and were not done with her yet.

Natasha rode up beside him, sitting her horse very easily.

"Those Bolsheviki were part of the 2nd Squadron of the Communist Interior Defense. The rest of the squadron is at Troitsk-Kosavsk so the prisoners stated," she informed him.

"Could you find out what force of men is stationed there?" he asked.

"Between four and five hundred."

Davies shook his head.

"Pretty big mouthful," he commented, and rode with bent head, figuring on the problem before him.

It was certain, he reasoned that they were followed and shadowed. The death of the Mongol soldier yesterday marked with the same reversed swastika that had disfigured the body of the poor devil who had been killed at Chita was proof enough of that.

TO BE CONTINUED

RALPH R. PERRY *tells*

what makes ships and men

SEAWORTHY

OCEAN and sky were gray—the cold, impenetrable gray without hint of sun which presages a winter North Atlantic gale. The barometer was down. From the northeast the wind was rising, and a chill, driving mist that was almost rain whipped across the bridge of the *Grand Turk*. Through a sullen sea the ancient six thousand ton tramp steamer shouldered along on her course, fifteen hundred miles from Ushant, fifteen hundred miles from Ambrose Light. A lonely ship in mid-Atlantic, steaming along with a cracked propeller shaft and hull plating rusted thin, bound for Le Havre—or Davy Jones.

Silently the *Grand Turk's* officers gathered on the bridge. Disco Carver, the master, a State of Maine man, built like a capstan, short and solid; Pruitt, the chief officer, a bony six footer with a perpetual sneer; the chief engineer, bald, sandy of mustache, shivering in his thin dungarees at the chill touch of the northeaster.

All were grave. They did not trust their ship. Expert opinion as to the seaworthiness of the old tub differed, and the sea has no patience with opinions of any sort. It was about to test the facts, with twenty-five foot waves sweeping out of the northeast at half a mile a minute, the spray volleying level from their crests.

Nor did the three men trust one another. This was their first voyage together. Ashore each had seen the owners, alone, and the desire of the owners was a problem as dubious and sinister as the stanchness of the ship. Le Havre—or Davy Jones? Disco Carver and the chief were newcomers. Pruitt had been first mate of the old wagon for years. To each the owners might have made a—suggestion; and each, knowing his own mind, but uncertain of the purpose held by the other two, was grave.

By contrast the wireless operator seemed to grin like an underfed ape when he came hurrying on to the bridge. Sparks was a freckled nineteen year old kid making his first voyage. The shore pallor was not off his face. It was his first gale, and what with the gossip going around the ship he did not know whether he relished the prospect or not. He grinned because under the circumstances cheerfulness seemed the proper tack to take.

"Been talking to the *Hammett*," he reported. "Southwest of us, and close. Her signals come in strong."

Sparks wanted Disco Carver to realize he was really sea-going and knew what questions to ask another ship. He did not like to say that he could keep in touch with her every minute of the gale, if the captain so desired, although that was what he had in mind.

"Eight thousand tons. A York Line steamer, bound to Havre with a general cargo," he added.

"And what of that?" said Carver.

"Why, I thought—"

"You go back and stand watch, kid," said Carver. "Keep those do-funnies over your ears, but don't bother me unless you *hear* an SOS."

THE captain's manner kept the order from being a reprimand, but when the kid had got out of earshot Carver turned suddenly to face his chief officer.

"Why should Sparks be thinking of sending an SOS unless you've waggled your jaw, Mr. Pruitt?" he demanded.

The bony mate looked down his long nose. Carver did not stand over five foot six, but he weighed two hundred, and every pound was firm, hard muscle. Such a physique is not uncommon along the Maine coast. Carver was a good example of the type. Brownish hair, blue eyes, a skin that turned brick red without tanning, and a pleasant disposition which masked the single minded tenacity of a bulldog. Right now the captain was angry, and he let the mate see it.

Pruitt, however, had a backbone himself.

"Why not? We were sent to sea to sink," he answered. "Hell, Captain, there's no use of our kidding ourselves with the glass 29.4 and going down! There's three hundred thousand dollars insurance on this old wagon. She's too old to repair, and ain't worth twenty thousand as junk. Shaft or our bow plates, something's *bound* to go—sometime. Think the owners don't savvy that? Before the old skipper and chief quit. I *know* they reported what was what!"

"Went to th' owners myself. Orders were, 'Take her to Le Havre'," said Carver. He used the clipped nasal speech of a Yankee who is dead in earnest. "'N' I calc'late to obey orders if I break the owners. Jest thought I'd tell ye. Now—" he shrugged—"keep her headed into the wind. I'm going below to get me some sleep. Going to need it."

Without another word Carver walked off the bridge. Perhaps he should have answered the mate's insinuation with a threat, but he did not see the use of wasting his breath. Pruitt had not done anything more than put into words a thought every man jack aboard had had in his mind since the *Grand Turk* sailed. By his reply Carver had simply hoisted his colors. He meant to take the ship through if he could.

"How is the shaft, anyway?" said Pruitt when the skipper's broad back was out of sight. "I can damn' well tell you the bow plates are nothing but paint and rust."

"How's your mother-in-law's temper?" retorted the chief acidly. "Rotten! If we steam straight into the wind, like Carver says, we may get through at that. You can feel the propeller flutter, but maybe it's just a loose blade. Yes, maybe!"

The chief was heavily sarcastic, for the prospect of standing watch, nursing that propeller through the gale lest it snap off and leave the ship a wallowing hulk, did not improve his temper.

"Yet I've known a ship to steam six thousand miles with a fluttering propeller. On the Australian run . . . There's no telling."

Pruitt looked down his nose.

He did not pursue the subject, but when the chief went below he busied himself with a personal inspection of the lifeboats. He checked over oars, sails, hardtack, water; examined the blocks and falls; got up a half barrel of oil and placed it by the starboard rail. If worse come to worse that, at least, would take the lash off the seas.

He had sailed in the *Grand Turk* longer than the others, and thought he knew best the capabilities of the ship. He did not believe she would live through the gale, and he had no intention that she should. For Pruitt thought he knew the owners best, too.

HE HAD nerve. A man needs physical courage to scuttle a ship in mid-Atlantic. He was not far wrong in his estimate of the owners, either, except that he was vastly mistaken in ascribing to them a moral courage of the same stern fiber as his own. He was risking his own life, too. He had put a bee in the wireless operator's bonnet and was seeing to the lifeboats because he did not intend to drown anybody. Of course, there were those unlucky accidents which every sailor risks when he chooses the trade. He was planning a crime, and he faced the fact, whereas the owners of the *Grand Turk* had passed the buck.

They had given no orders that the ship be sunk. The very word barratry would have appalled them. Only rough-necks like Pruitt, men who live hard and drink hard, who follow the sea for thirty years and never get a command, who marry a pretty girl in their early twenties and watch her become hardened by toil and hopelessness, achieve the courage to give their desires such explicit, ugly names. The owners of the *Grand Turk* called it business. They were not positive the old ship was not seaworthy. She might be, and in order to find out they sent Disco Carver and twenty-six men to sea in mid January.

Even that statement might be too severe. The facts are these:

When the *Grand Turk* docked at New York on her previous voyage, her former captain and chief engineer went to the owners and delivered an ultimatum—put her into dry dock for a complete overhauling or they'd quit. She was a so-and-so and thus-and-thus old basket. What was wrong? Everything. They were going on to explain when they found themselves on the sidewalk. The *Grand Turk* was so old that putting her into dry dock would mean a hundred thousand dollar job. She would not earn that much in ten years, and the owners did not consider it for a second. They showed the two sailors out of the office and waited for the report of the board of steamship inspectors.

Now there are many flaws which become apparent in a ship at sea that are hard to find in port. It is like trying to discover what is wrong with a car without starting the engine. The inspectors were expert, honest men; but they could not tap every inch of the *Grand Turk's* hull plating with a hammer, nor look down through twelve feet of dirty harbor water and see that her shaft was cracked just where it joined the propeller. She seemed no worse than she had always been, so the inspectors passed her. That meant her owners could get insurance, and a cargo.

In a word, experts disagreed, and the owners of the *Grand Turk* were expert in nothing save obtaining fifteen cents annually from every dollar they invested.

They were uneasy, for the discharged sailors had been specific as well as profane; but as business men they could not see any sense in putting the ship into dry dock. The sailors might be right, but by doing nothing the owners would make a profit and keep their own skirts clear. By law the steamships inspectors are responsible for a vessel's seaworthiness, her master for her safety, and the lives of her crew, while at sea. The owners looked about for another captain. They did not consciously consider the probable value of the *Grand Turk* in comparison with the insurance the underwriters had placed upon her.

This was proven when the owners interviewed Pruitt. He was the logical candidate for the captaincy, but they did not like him. He was too obviously a drinking man. Still, he had been with them five years and they thought they had to ask him if he wanted the job.

Pruitt looked down his nose.

He didn't, he said. Not particularly. He was thinking of his future. The *Grand Turk* really wasn't worth the insurance on her. The owners wanted to sell her, didn't they, and buy a more modern ship? Yes? Well, it was too bad the market wasn't good. *He'd* like command of the new ship.

The owners sighed. They wished they had one to give him. But why didn't he take the *Grand Turk?*

Well, she was in bad shape. Too hard to run. Why not get a younger man for master, and let Pruitt himself stay on as mate until they could buy another vessel? The younger man would be responsible. He'd be getting used to the old egg crate, while Pruitt wouldn't have to work so hard . . .

Now, of course, that was nonsense. A mate works twice as hard as a captain, and Pruitt believed the owners knew that much, and understood why he suggested the younger man would be responsible. It was a fact that the bony chief mate did not want command of the *Grand Turk.* He knew she could not last much longer, and he thought the owners knew it. When they demanded excitedly what he meant by calling her an egg crate, he looked down his nose.

All right, go mate, they said. They'd talk about a command for him later. Pruitt rose with a wooden face and a lump in his throat. He thought they understood what he meant, though actually the owners were passing the buck again. They did not want Pruitt as master of a ship of theirs, and they welcomed any suggestion that enabled them to promote a man over his head.

CARVER was the sort they wanted. The burly, little Yankee inspired confidence, and though he was young—about twenty-six, the owners guessed—he had credentials to burn. Carver had gone to sea at the age of six in a lobster dory. He sailed the Grand Banks. He had qualified for a master's certificate before he was old enough to vote, and had gone as high as second mate in a passenger run.

"You've never been in command before?" asked the senior owner, looking up from the papers. He was a dark, stoutish man who wore white waistcoats and gold rimmed glasses. He excelled in keeping down the overhead.

"There's my license," said Carver shortly. "It's been known since yesterday you wanted a skipper. There's a dozen captains, including yours, down at the Seaman's Church Institute. Been no rush for the job, has there?"

"Meaning what?" barked the junior owner, a sharp nosed little man, very proud of his taste in neckties. He had started as an office boy in a broker's office, and his ambition was to own a race horse. He could smell a hundred tons of cargo half around the world.

"If any discharged employee of ours is saying a word against us I'll have him arrested!"

"I wouldn't," said Carver. "Just mentioned it because I don't think you'll gain anything by shopping around and keeping the *Grand Turk* in port. My destination's Le Havre?"

"Of course!" said the owners together.

Carver relaxed somewhat, and his eyes seemed startlingly blue against his brick red skin.

"The mate's still aboard, that's why I asked," he said mildly. "Funny what a man'll do for a dollar, isn't it? Take me. I got a fine girl, and want to get married. Not on mate's pay, though. If a sailor can get to be captain once, he can get other jobs as captain. That's why I'm here, taking a chance. If I'd ever shipped as master, I'd be sitting down at the Institute, too."

"The inspectors—" began the senior owner.

"We've installed a new wireless, the most up-to-date model," interrupted the junior hastily. "Captain, we wish you an easy voyage!"

Carver said nothing. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask why they had installed a wireless, but it seemed tactful not to speak. He had, as he had intimated, a pretty clear idea of what the *Grand Turk* was, but for the sake of the promotion he was ready to gamble his seamanship against the winter gales; if, as he believed, bad weather was all that he would have to face.

When he put to sea the fluttering of the propeller worried him from the start, and when the booming of the gale awakened him from his nap and he had mounted to the *Grand Turk's* bridge again, he sensed that he had undertaken too big a gamble. Wind and sea were no worse than he had expected, but the ship was logy. It seemed to him she was down by the head. Had those rust pitted plates in the bow wrenched apart already?

"Where's Pruitt?" Carver asked the second mate on watch.

"Ain't seen him since he was fussin' around the boats."

"Ship's riding the seas pretty well." Carver did not think so. He wanted the second mate's opinion.

The *Grand Turk* put her nose into a big wave. Her bow vanished. Green water cascaded across the forecastle head into the well deck and spouted out through the sea ports, while a sheet of spray made both officers duck behind the protection of the bridge screen. Water splashed against the chart house, flowed across the bridge ankle deep.

"Nah, she's heavy," said the second mate. "That sea weren't nothing."

"Nothing much," the captain agreed. "Tell Mr. Pruitt I've gone to look at the fore holds."

Until the watches changed, which would not be for a half hour, there was no way in which the second mate could pass that order. He could not leave the bridge himself, and there was no sailor around except the man at the wheel. In half an hour Pruitt would come topside to take over the ship and then he would learn where the captain had gone. It was unlikely he would be informed before that time—which was exactly what Carver wanted.

FOR a man who had at least a half hour to wait, however, the skipper moved with extreme haste. With water covering the deck two feet deep at every sea, he could not get into the fore holds by opening a hatch. He had to open a door in the water tight bulkhead below decks, and crawl forward over the cargo, puffing and grunting as he squeezed his broad shoulders into the narrow spaces beneath the deck beams. It was pitch dark, and his flashlight was hard to handle. A nail caught his oilskins. He jerked himself free, tearing oilskins, trousers, and the skin beneath; swore, but wormed his way into the forward hold without pause or caution.

The beam of his flashlight revealed a leak in the starboard bow. Water oozed and spurted along the edges of the plates as the ship twisted in its wrestle with the sea, but the amount, as Carver had suspected, was trifling. A few gallons a minute would never have affected the trim of the ship, and without investigating more closely the captain worked his way amidships to the sea valve.

For a moment he could discover nothing wrong. The square iron rod, or

riser, which extended from the valve in the bottom of the ship to a hand wheel on the deck above, seemed undamaged. With the sea flooding the well deck no one could have reached that wheel unseen; besides, it was padlocked and the keys were in his pocket. Yet, Carver was unconvinced. He snapped off his light and listened.

The creaking of the hull and the thunder of the sea outside filled his ears, yet, faintly under that chorus he sensed the sloshing of water in the cargo.

"Must be!" he muttered, and switching on his light, pulled aside a case that lay against the valve riser. His suspicions were confirmed. The riser had been sawed in half with a hack saw. The valve was about a quarter open.

Carver flung himself upon it and tried to close it with his hands, but the task was too much even for his strength. He would have to get a wrench. He lay on his stomach, panting. He would have to work fast. He would be missed from the bridge—needed on deck. He could not come below again, but whoever had opened that valve could. Nonsense to think of a gun, or irons; he had no evidence. The valve could not be locked now . . . maybe Pruitt had done it . . . maybe half the crew had been bribed. Carver did not know.

He crawled back over the cargo, racking his brains for an expedient by which to get his ship to port. If he lost the *Grand Turk* no firm would be likely to entrust him with another vessel for a long, long time. That was the gamble he had taken when he signed on. He could not get a wrench from the engine room without questions. If he told the truth there would be hell to pay. Every man aboard would distrust the next. The slightest mishap would stampede all hands to the boats. Could he not think of a convincing lie? Repairs were not in his department.

No, he would either have to rouse the crew to the point where they would stand by the ship to the end, disregarding their own safety, or force whoever had opened that valve to close it in secret. Carver could think of just one scheme. He abandoned the idea of getting a wrench himself, and hurried to his cabin. A few minutes delay would not sink the *Grand Turk*.

"Sparks—come here, quick!" he whispered through the speaking tube that led to the wireless room.

He heard the boy gasp with relief, and wondered why; wondered why the boy's eyes should be starting out of his head when he came plunging into the cabin. He caught him firmly by both shoulders before he could speak. Carver needed to talk to a cool head. He shook the operator vigorously and pushed him into a chair.

"Keep your shirt on, Sparks," he snapped. "Nothing's happened—yet. Listen and get this straight. I'll push your face in if you don't work it right."

Spark's mouth opened and shut.

"Go back to your shack," said the captain. "In a minute come runnin' out like you did now. Yell you've got an SOS from a ship to windward—northeast of us, and not too close. Here, I'll give you a position."

"Bu—bu—but—"

"But hell!" snapped Carver. "Forget ye ain't heard no such thing! Ye make the crew think we're the only ship can reach them—that if we don't keep afloat some one besides us is done for!"

Sparks got a grip on himself.

"Bu—but there *is!* The *Hammett's* foundering," he gasped. "Ten minutes ago we got the SOS, and Mr. Pruitt says we daren't turn around in this sea without you give the order. The mate sent him to the fore hold after you, and I've been clean cuckoo, sir! What'll I tell them?"

Carver stared and wet his lips. Coming about would half founder the ship, but that was a trifle, almost. To run before wind and sea would crack the propeller if anything would. With a ship already down by the head they would be liable to run clear under, dive into one wave, disappear forever when the following wave caught them.

"Isn't any one else closer, that's seaworthy?" he asked.

"No, sir. Mr. Pruitt asked that," said Spark. "There's the *Cytherea*, sir, but she can't get there till dawn. The *Hammett* won't last long, sir, her operator says. What'll I tell them?"

"Why, tell 'em we're comin'," said Carver. He was smiling a little, as though at some grim jest. "I'm goin' after Pruitt."

CARVER went below alone, still smiling in the tight lipped Yankee fashion at this jest of fate. He found the bulkhead door into the forward hold open, and as he bent to crawl into the dark interior for a second time the beam of a flashlight struck him in the eyes. The mate was crawling out. Carver waited in the passageway. As Pruitt crawled he kept the beam of his flashlight in the skipper's eyes, and when he rose he held his right hand behind him. Carver was conscious of the rent in his oilskins; remembered that he had not replaced the case against the severed sea valve riser.

"Well?" said Pruitt. The bony mate packed a lot of meaning into that word. The sneer on his face was more pronounced. From behind his back he produced a sixteen-inch monkey wrench, gripped tightly by the handle.

"We're going after the *Hammett*," said Carver quietly. "I need that wrench."

Pruitt looked him straight in the eye.

"That's what I figured, too," said the mate. "Ain't it hell on me, though? This was my chance for a real command, after thirty years."

Carver was silent. After a second Pruitt went on with the same grim humor.

"There was a sea valve open. I don't think you could have shut it, Captain. Not alone." The monkey wrench shook in the grip of the mate's bony fingers. "Well, it's shut!" he ended. "You can do what you damn' well please about it afterward. I never asked favors!"

"After what?" said the burly little skipper gently. "If we make port, I won't understand what you mean. It'll be this way: There was a leak forward, but the sea valve couldn't have been open. I sawed through the riser to keep the crew from tampering with it from the deck. I was afraid they'd lose their nerve while we were running before the gale. If we *don't* make port—you win, anyway."

"Not me!" said Pruitt. "We got to come about twice. How many boats will we have left?"

"One, I hope. The *Hammett* hasn't any."

"Not enough for you or me to get off in, anyhow," said the mate. "Nope, it's you that have a chance—such as it is!"

Back on the bridge Pruitt and Carver put the *Grand Turk* about. They tried to pick a moment of comparative calm, but there was little choice. A sea caught them on the quarter and nearly rolled them under. It took the port lifeboats to glory, knocked off twenty feet of rail, and swept everything clear aft but the steam steering engine house. It smashed a door on that.

Then they started down wind, yawing wildly, carried along on those big seas like a chip. The black smoke from their stacks was beaten down by the rain into the white sea in front, and a throb and tremble went through the hull every time the stern lifted their propeller into thin water.

"She'll steer better tailing a hawser aft," said Pruitt.

"Make it so," said Carver, and the mate took a gang aft and got the hawser out.

It was a difficult job, for every time the ancient *Grand Turk* stuck her nose into a sea the bow would stay down until a man held his breath for fear she was going to run under. That was a wild trip down the wind. They had an hour of it. For the first ten minutes all hands thought every wave was going to be their last, and kept one eye to windward and the other on the single lifeboat bobbing in the starboard davits. Just one boat, but it would hold them all, by crowding. Pruitt watched it, and grinned sourly.

After ten minutes they got used to the mad charge, and their nerves ceased jumping. They were looking for the *Ham-*

mett. When they found her—which was luck in that smother of rain and foam—she was a hulk, wallowing in the troughs. Masts gone, boats gone, fires out, listing twenty degrees, with men clinging like ants to her weather rail.

"Get volunteers for your lifeboat, Mr. Pruitt," said Carver.

"Get volunteers to *stay*, you mean," snapped the mate. "We can get those lads, but we'll never get the lifeboat back aboard. You'll have to turn again to get to leeward to pick us up, and I don't think the old wagon will stand it. We'll be in the lifeboat—crowded, but able to ride it out. Take the boat yourself, Captain. I can't handle a boat like an old Banks fisherman."

"Skipper sticks with his ship," said Carver. "Your lifeboat will be too crowded to last long, Mister. Best get back aboard, if we make it to windward."

Pruitt shrugged and went to pick his crew. No man he selected hung back, for the four men he needed were the lucky ones. All hands helped to swing out the boat which was their own last chance of escape. The sea was high, but the gear Pruitt had overhauled worked without a hitch. The boat dropped on top of a wave and pulled away from the side, rounded under the *Hammett's* lee, and hung there, close enough for the shipwrecked crew to jump, while the oarsmen pulled frantically to keep the hulk from drifting down and swamping them. Pruitt hauled man after man aboard with a boat hook. There were twenty-eight of them in all, which, with the lifeboat crew, made thirty-three in a boat intended to carry nineteen. The mate wiped the spray out of his eyes and looked around for the *Grand Turk* when he finished. Carver had been right. He was not going to pull that lifeboat far. Already the rescued men were bailing frantically to keep her afloat.

TO HIS relief, however, the *Grand Turk* was close by. Her bow was low in the water. In heaving-to to launch the lifeboat she had lost another section of rail, and smashed her bridge. Carver had not dared to go to leeward in the usual way. Instead of turning a third time he had slowed his engines and drifted down wind after the *Hammett*, so that although he was within two hundred yards, Pruitt had to pull against wind and sea.

A hard pull, yet the mate made it. He hooked on to the flying boat tackles. The men he rescued flung themselves at the manropes, climbing like monkeys, four or five to every line. A big sea picked the boat up and hurled it deck high after them. Pruitt and the lifeboat crew leaped over the rail on to the *Grand Turk's* deck. The rescued seaman tumbled after, sprawling against the sailors who manned the tackles. For a second the deck of the *Grand Turk* was a welter of men, but that same big sea which flung them all aboard safely smashed the lifeboat like an eggshell. Carver got his gang on their feet and hauled aboard what was left of it, but he might as well have cut the wreckage adrift.

Pruitt, who flung himself on to the fall at Carver's side, took one look and swore.

"And we bring these guys back—to this!" he growled into the little skipper's ear.

"Shut up!" snapped Carver. "The barometer's rising. With them at the pumps we may last till the *Cytherea* picks us up."

"Well, these *Hammett* guys got a right to be picked up by a *ship*, not a damned question mark," grumbled the mate. "You sent out an SOS?"

Carver nodded and returned to the bridge. He crouched behind the dodger, keeping out of the blast of the wind and the hammering spray as much as he could, while the *Grand Turk* settled down to her monotonous struggle with the sea. Night came on. The watches changed at eight, and at midnight, but he remained on deck.

At four Pruitt took a place beside him, and stood there silently. The men from the *Hammett* were at the pumps, but hand and steam pumps together could not gain on the inflow through the storm wracked

hull. The *Grand Turk* simply was being kept afloat.

IN THE faint dawn light Pruitt looked down his nose.

"Well?" he demanded. Carver did not pretend to misunderstand.

"We both lose," he answered quietly. "She'll last till the *Cytherea* gets here. With luck we could pump her clear to Le Havre, but I'm not asking the crew to take that chance just to make me a skipper. *I've* got to give orders to abandon a ship that's still afloat and able to make knots. That's going to look nice on my record. You ain't any better off. You didn't sink her!"

"The owners will thank you," said Pruitt. "Do you suppose," he went on reflectively, "that if I'd hit you over the head with that wrench—it was in my mind—an' this leaky teapot had gone down on the way to the *Hammett*, that the owners would have given me command of their new one? They never said, right out."

"Doubt it," snapped Carver. "That's what's been gripping me all night. They shipped you an' me on this tub knowing what we had in mind, because they stood to win no matter how it came out. What'd they care whether the *Grand Turk* was seaworthy? If I got her across, they'd ship another skipper to take her back. If you sunk her, they'd bat their eyes when you come hinting around the office, and ask you what the devil you meant? Well, if you had done it, there'd be twenty-eight men drowned!"

"*Cytherea* might have got them. And might not have got the whole sixty four of us, only for luck," Pruitt contradicted. "We weren't fit to answer an SOS. Only we had to."

"Sailor's got to be seaworthy whether a ship is or not," said the burly little skipper curtly. "Only if I was sure our owners knew what they were putting us up against. If I knew this wagon wasn't seaworthy—she's still afloat, and running—"

A thundering roar of machinery from the engine room drowned the captain's remark. For an instant the *Grand Turk's* old engines raced at a hundred revolutions a minute, shaking the ship to her keel, then the chief, ready at the controls, cut off the steam before the engines went to pieces. The propeller had snapped off at last.

On deck the two officers looked at one another.

"The owners knew, all right," said Carver softly. "Pruitt, that might've happened when we were swinging your boat ashore. Ain't it worth a skipper's berth to show the owners you can't gamble with the North Atlantic without risking something?"

"The *Cytherea* won't leave us now. No risk of life," said the mate softly. "It hurt to crawl into the hold and close that valve."

"A fifteen hundred mile tow to pay for," whispered Carver. "Salvage, and then the owners will have to put her in dry dock. Profit, huh? *I* thought of profit tonight, standing on deck watching the lads pump, with the ship settling lower in the water! I want that to cost the owners a hundred dollars a minute!"

At sunrise the captain of the *Cytherea*, bringing his ship alongside a battered little tramp, wondered why the burly skipper of the *Grand Turk* grinned when he signed a claim for salvage. The mate looked pleased, too. Both of them must have been good seamen. The sailors off the *Hammett* said so, and besides, they refused to abandon their vessel. Seamen of that type, and it had taken seamanship to keep their battered vessel afloat, will ordinarily go to any length to save their owner's money. Of course, a propeller can not be shipped at sea, but the captain of the *Cytherea* could not understand why the *Grand Turk's* officers should grin about it.

He never found out, but the owners of the *Grand Turk* learned. Had not Carver and Pruitt, signing on as mates with the York Line, a right to grin at a three hundred thousand dollar jest?

Then

LUCK CAME IN

An Aviation Sergeant Who Yearned To Fly

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

THE SERGEANT was a much abused man. Wartime flying had not used him any too well; nor had after the war aviation done any better. Now he was nearing the end of his Army career.

The sergeant had wanted to fly. He wanted to go solo and do his own birding. It had always been his one ambition. And it was through no fault of his own that the big desire had never been fully realized. Fact is, along those lines the much abused sergeant was without fault. He had always done his share.

The sergeant was too willing in 1917. Later—too late—he realized this. Had he held off, as the other millions did, and waited for the war to get at good speed, he would have made his way into a ground school and started right. But the sergeant did not know that there were to be such schools. None knew this. So the sergeant enlisted. Willingly the aviation branch of the Signal Corps took him. Oh, yes, of course, they said he would fly.

But the sergeant turned out to be a handy mechanic. Good mechanics were few—and are still—so the sergeant, though he didn't guess it, was never going to get to fly.

On the other side of the pond his bad luck continued. That was when they made him a sergeant, made him a sergeant, chief airplane rigger, while they made flying cadets of the goldbricks in his squadron. That hurt—hurt like—well, it hurt.

"But look here, Sergeant," his commanding officer said in rebuttal, "now let's be reasonable; it takes years to make a good mechanic. And only hours to

lache a full fledged pilot; and the stuff of which airmen are made need not know anything—or much. See the point? You're important on this field; these other birds going out as cadets are, as a rule, culls we're glad to be rid of. Now get back to your hangar and feel satisfied that you are doing your bit, and a hell of a big bit, Sergeant!"

That line of official chatter did not help the sergeant at all.

"I've heard it before," he told his rigging crews. "Doing my bit! Bit be damned! The effect of my first patriotic drunk has worn off. What I want to do is fly and I'm going to!"

The sergeant did learn to fly; but he "stole" the flying time, begged all the dual control instruction he could mooch and waxed mighty handy on rudder bar and stick. And he learned quickly. You see, like many other mechanics, he really knew how to fly before he ever had a ship in his hands. Once in the air he merely had to gain the feel of the thing. And he got it too. He made a takeoff on the third hop, landed on his fifth.

His job was on a pursuit field—all single seater planes. The ship on which he had learned—a Nieuport 23—was a two place visitor. He was all set to fly alone. Then, that same day, they took the 23 away. The sergeant saw red, and spoke in the same color.

"Cheated again!" he said. "I'm going into town, get all drunked up and take an M.P. apart! Wait and see!"

YOU CAN not get the sergeant's point of view unless you have loved air and wanted to fly. But if you had loved air and wanted to fly, you would have gone to town with him and helped take a flock of M.P's apart.

Unofficially grabbing flying time wherever and whenever he could get any, the sergeant lived in hopeless hope, if such a thing exists. But our war lasted only a day; and once gone it was gone forever. The sergeant's field did not go directly out of business, with the coming of the Armistice, but his interest in things did. For him it was the end of everything—and nothing.

Then, with the idea of training more pilots for future wars, headquarters sent the sergeant's squadron on to an Avro, two place, training field. The sergeant's interest came back. He stole lots of time. loved Avros and added acrobatics to his straight flying. The war after the war was treating him better.

New made flying cadets came to that field. Lord! Where did they get such dubs? The sergeant wondered. From every orderly room at the center was the answer. It was a dog robbers' holiday.

"I'll get the C.O's permission to turn you loose, Sergeant," an instructor said. "You can fly rings round any bird in this group. I'll get papers through for you too; no reason why you shouldn't get a brevet. I understand that they've handed commissions to a few 31st men."

The sergeant said that they had.

For a night, life couldn't be improved upon.

Next morning, February 12, headquarters "washed out" all flying and called in the Avros. They say that the sergeant took a lieutenant of M.P's apart at high noon of the same day in the public square at Issoudun. After that, for him, the world fused.

The sergeant's outfit came back to the States. Air Service wanted to hold some of its best mechanics. At Mitchel Field they promised the sergeant and some of his gang that, were they to reenlist for another stretch, flying would be their dish for sure.

The sergeant took his discharge. Then he was tempted—and fell. He put up his hand for another hitch. And headquarters shipped him to Carlstrom Field, Florida.

NEW CLASSES of cadets came to that field. Even one of the cooks from the sergeant's overseas squadron was among them. They were the worst cadets the sergeant ever saw. But he worked planes for them; and in turn, headquarters never did put the

sergeant on flying status. But the much abused one continued to mooch some unofficial airwork. So the months of his one year enlistment dragged by and he came toward the happy end, the end which was going to be so welcome because he did not give a good, bad or indifferent damn. And he told his C.O. as much when that worthy asked him whether he intended to sign up for a third cruise.

"You're not talking to me, Lieutenant," the sergeant said. "For three years I've lived on hope. When I took on this reenlistment, they promised me, on a stack of Bibles, that I'd fly. And have I?"

Any number of ex-overseas men could answer this.

"But this time you will," the lieutenant said. "This school has the ships and men now, and I'll promise you—"

"Tie that outside, Lieutenant," the sergeant answered, "I've heard it all before.

"By this time next Monday afternoon, America will have one more civilian on her hands. And she's going to collect a mean problem, too. I'm sore, Lieutenant. I've been cheated too often to smile and turn the other cheek. This deal I've had handed me by Air Service smells like a eucalyptus kitty— See that guy climbing into that rear cockpit—" the sergeant pointed to a plane at the deadline—"well, that same jaybird used to be a bum cook in my outfit overseas. Shane's his name. All that heller ever did for American honor was lap up French booze and make trouble. He was our ace of aces at it, too. Shane and me, Lieutenant, have been two different kinds of soldiers, but today he's getting in official flying time and I'm still begging rides like a raw John Recruit. Where's your damn' justice in that? I'll answer—out for lunch with two rags around her eyes! Me, reenlist? In a pig's eye! Wonder what's wrong with that plane."

The plane into which they had watched Cadet Shane climb had started for a takeoff, bounced into the air, fluttered a few rods and dropped again for a hasty landing. It taxied back to where they were standing. It was one of the sergeant's ships. At the deadline the instructor, Lieutenant Black, swung from his front cockpit, removed his goggles and said:

"Wish you'd look this ship over, Sergeant. The controls jam in the air. Bob Watts was flying it this morning and he had the same trouble."

"I'll work her over," the sergeant promised. He looked at his watch. "Four o'clock now," he said. "You won't want to fly any more today, Lieutenant. She'll be jake in the morning."

"That's O.K. with me, Sergeant," Lieutenant Black agreed, and walked away with the sergeant's C.O.

Cadet Shane was sore. He had been robbed of his afternoon period and did not care who knew that he was burned up.

"Damn' funny you guys can't keep ships in condition," he said. "I haven't had two hours' airwork outa this hangar in two weeks."

"Too damn' bad about you, Shane," was all the sympathy the sergeant extended. "If you're as rotten a flyer as you were a cook, the field will be the winner if you never fly."

FOR THE next hour the sergeant, with a helper, worked the ship that went wrong in the air. At the end of said time he had located nothing wrong with the controls. Bob Watts came along during operations and told his story. Then, just to be on the safe side, the sergeant sent for the field inspector, Blackie Milander. He came along and demanded—

"Wot's eatin' you, kid?"

"This crate, Blackie, was turned in because her controls froze in the air," the sergeant said. "I've looked her over, and my fair haired helper here has looked her over, and Lieutenant Watts was on hand and had his say and look, and we find nothing wrong. The control cables, all of 'em, are O.K. Not a fray on any of them. The ball socket joint is jake; and the pulleys are free. Now, you give her the expert eye, Blackie, and say what's to be done.

Gladly we pass the buck to you and, if failing, you muff the torch thus thrown, well you'll get burnt."

Blackie, working till long after retreat, scratched his head finally and announced:

"Damned if she ain't got me stopped! On the ground here, everything's free. D'you know what I think, Sergeant?"

"If a thought there be, Blackie, shoot before it burns you out. What do you guess?"

"I think that Watts and Black are full of hop! There's nothing wrong with this pile of wreckage, and I'll give her a clear bill. Let me O.K. that flying sheet."

When the hangars opened in the morning the sergeant's C.O. was at hand.

"What did you learn about that plane of Black's?" he wanted to know. "Anything haywire?"

"Not a thing, Lieutenant, "the sergeant admitted. "What say if you and I give it a hop right now? See if we can locate any 'bugs' in the air."

"We'll do that little thing," the C.O. agreed. "Got a helmet and goggles I can use?"

While the C.O. waited, and the men started the plane's motor, the squadron clerk came to the hangar for the C.O. They talked for a few minutes, then the C.O. told the sergeant:

"I'll have to call this flight off for now. There're some papers for me to sign. I'll see you later."

Fifteen minutes before the first cadet class reported for the nine o'clock period, Lieutenant Black came to the line. The sergeant told the lieutenant all that he had not learned.

"But I don't want to pass the buck too crudely," the sergeant concluded. "What's the matter with us two going up in the thing and learning what's to be learned?"

What the sergeant wanted was more airwork. He would have taken his flying on the tail end of a rocket were no other means offered. The fact that a ship's action was in question meant nothing to him. More than likely the sergeant was glad that nobody had been able to locate the kink; test flying is always to the liking of a real lover of air. The betting's even that the sergeant had planned this moment during the previous night. As he talked, he talked Black toward the waiting plane. The instructor was adjusting helmet and goggles, and his silence gave consent.

"It's funny," he finally said. as they waited for the motor man to warm the engine, "but those controls did jam. I don't want any of my cadets to get in dutch through mechanical faults. They're bad enough without that. The Lord only knows when I'll be able to turn any of them loose. Such an iron fisted bunch of shovel apprentices I've never met. They wouldn't've made good K.P's. for the wartime *kadets*.

"And these damn' Jennies have got to be right, Sergeant. As right as they can be, and if they were twice as right as that, they'd still be all wrong. Climb in and we'll take a turn of the field."

WHILE they were adjusting the safety belts, Cadet Shane came running along the line of hangars. He scrambled aboard Black's lower wing and talked into the instructor's left ear. Black throttled his motor low, pushed back his goggles, thought for half a minute, studied his instrument board dials, shook and kicked his controls, then turned to the man in the rear seat and said:

"Sergeant, I'm going to give the cadet his hop. These controls seem to be O.K. Chances are, there was nothing wrong with them.

"Jump out, Sergeant, and I'll let you know how they act. Watch my first turn of the field and see how I'm getting along. Climb in, Shane! Let's get going!"

The sergeant went back to the hangar. He wasn't talking to anybody, for the time being, but he hurled an open can of red paint the length of the big building and said to a few idle privates—

"Clean that up!"

Then, where a group of flying cadets were busily rolling two small cubes on a

work bench, the sergeant came down in hot wrath, threw the harmless squares through the skylight and yelled—

"Get to hell out of this hangar and stay out!"

After that the sergeant went out, retrieved the dice and reestablished the game. He told the cadets that he was sore about something but could not recall just what. After sending the privates off to goldbrick in the post exchange, the sergeant mopped up the paint.

MASTER SERGEANT SCIPLES, in charge of the hangar, came along to start the day. Sciples was spending this enlistment on the construction of certain souvenirs. And at no time did he allow hangar work to cut in on his program. He was an easy boss. Sciples looked at his sergeant rigger and came out in language that lay people erroneously suppose is solely characteristic of the Marine Corps. Here and there, without half trying, Master Sergeant Sciples could extemporize in a manner that would make the Marine Corps' glossary look like a first reader for morons. Sciples' language, to say the least, was able.

"Sergeant," he said, "one look at you, you tells me that you haven't had your morning flight. When will you forget this flying stuff and put your mind on next week's debut into the outer world? Why, you— Snap into it and get wise!"

"But, Sciples," the sergeant said. "It's the same old story. The same thing that I've been up against for three years. And it makes me mad, Sciples. Hell, if I live to be a hundred, I'll never lose this desire to fly. It's different with you, you old decrepit—the sergeant was never entirely tongue tied himself— You don't care about flying. The bug's never grazed upon you. You don't know the hell and pain and longing that an egg like me faces, Sciples. Why, Sciples, this thing of giving a right arm for something is nothing. I'd do another stretch in this damn' Army if I really thought that I'd aviate. And that is what I call bravery."

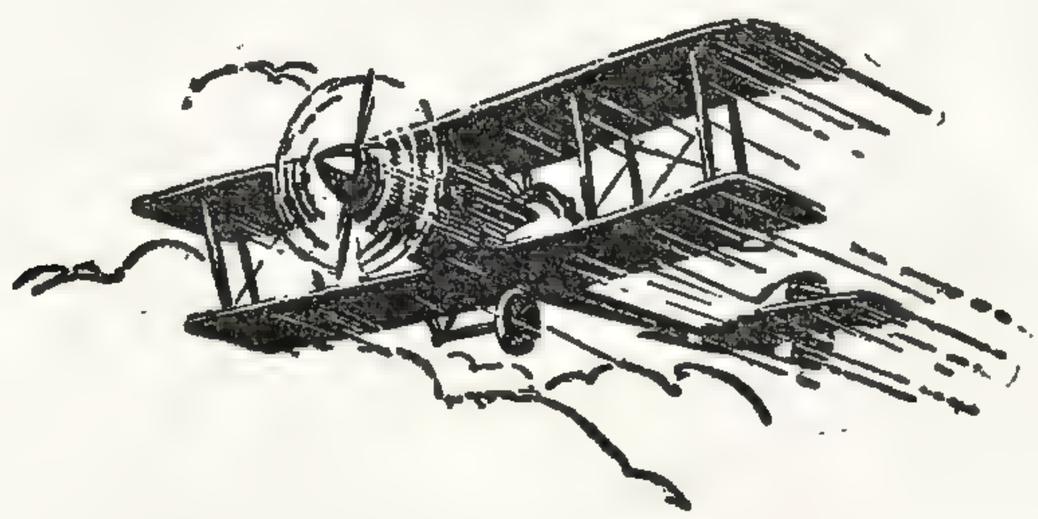
"Crazy as a loon!" Sciples exclaimed. "Why you—you don't know enough to—"

"And this was the most cruel thrust of all, Sciples," the sergeant went on, "this thing that came off half an hour ago, why—" The hangar's telephone rang, and Sciples, with the sergeant still talking, strolled toward the instrument—"why, there I was all set to take off with Black. Had myself nicely planted in the rear seat, and who comes out and robs me but my ex-cook, that rotten cook, Shane, and—" There were tears in the thick voice.

For a minute Sciples talked over the line. In the end he said, "Well that's hell," and hung up.

"What's hell?" the sergeant forgot his own troubles long enough to ask.

"Cadet Shane," Master Sergeant Sciples said, "Shane, the man who unseated you, Shane and Black spun into the ground ten miles from here. They both burned to death."



Gaialito

PLAYS SAFE

By ARTHUR WOODWARD

ONE TIME my old friend Gaialito, an orthodox Shiwi, aided in the hanging of a witch. According to his lights, the witch needed hanging, but the law of the white man was strange. It demanded several years of Gaialito's wild, free life. As a penalty he was shut up at Fort Wingate to meditate on his sins and learn English. Nor was that all. They cut off his long black hair, and that to an old time Shiwi was the crowning disgrace and insult of all. A Shiwi minus his long locks was a nobody—a man forever shamed. The iron of the white man's injustice entered into the old Indian's heart.

In time Gaialito returned to his rock and mud pueblo under the rainbow mesa. His hair had grown somewhat, but he felt naked and ashamed. His command of English was several hundred words greater than that of any of his fellow tribesmen and now he was looked upon as a witch because he could speak like a "Melikan". In truth Gaialito felt as if he had swallowed much shame.

Gaialito decided he would never hang another witch—unless he felt that there was absolutely no chance of being discovered. In fact he would not even tell the know nothing white men if he happened to slay a hated Navaho or a bearded beast of a Mexican.

Those Wasinton men might even decide that a dog of a Navaho who, as everybody knew, deserved killing on sight, had some value, or that a Mexican prowler of the dung heaps was actually a human being.

It was with something of these thoughts in his head that Gaialito met the two young Mexican renegade killers on the road from the Pueblo to his sheep ranch.

AT THAT time Gaialito was in his prime—a broad shouldered, thin muscled old chap, toughened by long foot races, and long weary hours with a heavy hoe in cornfields, distant some twenty miles from his home.

The renegades were bad men, wanted for murder and robbery. There were rewards posted for them in St. Johns, Gallup and Holbrook, but Gaialito did not know that.

Being in somewhat of a hurry, the desperados decided that they needed Gaialito's pony to help them along the road toward the Border and safety. They decided that the easiest way to get the horse would be to kill the old Indian in a very quiet way. They sounded him out, first in Spanish and then in English.

Gaialito feigned ignorance of both tongues, answering them fluently in Shiwi, telling them of their ancestry in the pleasant Shiwi fashion.

Accordingly, the two youths decided that he was only a naked feeble old Indio and they plotted aloud in English to slay him and make off with the pony.

Their plan was simple.

"I will ride in on him from this side, Pedro," said one, smiling pleasantly. "You come in gently on the other; do it slowly so as not to arouse the old goat's suspi-

cions. Then we can give him the knife together."

Gaialito was unarmed, but not so much as a blink of his eye lids did he give as a sign that he understood perfectly what was being said. But he had already made up his mind what he would do.

Slowly, as if they were but riding side by side in a friendly, neighborly fashion, the two Mexicans closed in on the old Shiwi.

Gaialito clucked stupidly to his pony but watched proceedings from the corners of his eyes.

"When I give the word prepare to strike," said the Mexican who had first spoken.

His friend nodded.

"Now!"

Ka-thop!

There was a sound as if two over ripe melons had been suddenly crushed together.

At the word of command, when both Mexicans were leaning from their saddles, the lean, sinewy arms of old Gaialito shot out like striking rattlers. Clamping the necks of the two would-be assassins in the crooks of his elbows, the old Shiwi athlete brought their heads together with such terrific force that the skulls caved in like two clay water jars.

They never knew what struck them.

Gaialito dropped the bodies to earth and then went methodically about the task of burying them. He dragged them into a dry wash and heaped boulders over them, took the saddles from their horses and chased the beasts into the hills. The saddles and bridles he likewise buried.

He went home singing an old time victory song.

WHEN he arrived at the pueblo he began to have misgivings. It was his nature to tell of such a stupendous deed to his fellow society and clan members in the *kiva* but the thoughts of the prison at Fort Wingate stilled that desire. If the white men without understandings had cut his hair off for killing but one vile witch, what might they not do to him for killing two Mexican dogs? Gaialito swallowed his tongue.

A day or so later the sheriff and a small posse arrived at the pueblo. They were looking for two Mexicans. Had any of the Indians seen them?

No, no, assuredly not. Were they friends of the sheriff?

Oh, yes, such great friends that the sheriff would pay a good many dollars to know where they were. Here the sheriff winked at his posse and spat expressively.

Two or three of the horsemen patted their gun belts suggestively.

"Here's your old welcome home committee right here, *hombres*. We want them greasers and want 'em bad. Five hundred dollars to the Injun that can lead us to them."

Gaialito was in the curious throng surrounding the posse in the main plaza of the town. Being one of the oldest men and knowing English—which vice came in handy, occasionally,— he questioned the sheriff.

"You ketchum Mejicanos, they *amigos*, you fiends, no?"

"No, is right; you're wrong," grinned the sheriff. "You ketchum, Gaialito, I pay you alla same five hundred dollas. Five, *cinco*, *sabe?*" The sheriff held up his hand, opening and closing it innumerable times to convey his meaning.

Yes, Gaialito savvied. Savvied heap much. Not for nothing had he served those long weary months in Wingate. The Melikans were clever at twisting words. Crazy like coyotes when it came to trapping Shiwis in a tangle of admissions that would send some one to the "tchail house."

Gaialito fingered his long newly grown hair.

"You givum me fi' huner dolla, me ketchum dose perros?"

"Yes, how many times do you have to be told that—you lava faced, snake hunter. You or any of the boys. They bad *hombres*, *sabe?* They kill white girl. They steal *muchos pesos*. Better shoot first and talk to 'em afterwards. Watch yer *caballos* and yer wimmen. C'mon

boys, we might as well *pasear* along. About as much use talkin' to this gang as there is carryin' on a tay-ta-tay with a hitch rack."

"Wait, minute, Shereef."

Old Gaialito laid a detaining hand on the bridle of the officials' horse.

"Now what? Make it snappy, old feller. We can't stay here all day."

"You shu you no put me in "tchail house" Fo' Wingate. No cuttum off my hair. No chokum neck with rope, me ketchum Mejicanos fo' you."

"Well, fer cripes sake, you old war bonnet! I've seen some dumb Injuns in my day, but you take the cake. I thought you might have a grain of intelligence, but I reckon I misjudged you a mite. Fer the tenth an' last time—No! No! No! You ketchum Mexicans. Showum to me, I see you get five hundred dollas."

"Oh, aw right. Now, you swear um on Book you no take me away?"

"Sheriff, I kinda think the old coot knows somethin," broke in one of the posse.

"Um, mebbe you're right. Won't hurt t' humor him. Sure, all right. I swear on Book, Gaialito, only where you ketchum Bible."

"*Kokshi*—good" grunted the old man. "I ketchum book, and he trotted away to his house.

In a few moments he returned, hugging a heavy book to his breast.

"Heah, now you tellum me all same man in 'tchail house' swear tellum truth or go t' hell!"

GAIALITO held out the book very gravely, as he had seen the clerk in the court do when he was being tried for hanging the witch. If a white man laid his hand on the book and made his vow, it was binding medicine. All sorts of evil things would happen to him if he lied. Such was the white man's law.

"Well, fer gosh sake!"

The sheriff tried to keep a straight face as he laid his left palm solemnly on the book proffered him and raised his right hand in best court room manner and swore that come what may, if Gaialito or any of his friends could point the way to the two greatly desired Mexicans, alive or dead, the five hundred would be theirs for keeps.

"Tha's good," said Gaialito when the sheriff finished. He closed the book very reverently and loped back to the house.

"Fust time I ever took an oath on Sears Roebuck," chuckled the sheriff, "but y' can't beat an Injun fer notions nohow. All right, Gaialito, now what?"

The old Shiwi had returned.

"You come, I showum you," said Gaialito, grinning.

"Show me what?" queried the sheriff. "A new calf, or litter of pups, or what?"

"Huh!" snorted the old warrior. "Showum you dead Mexicans."

"Well, I'll be damned! You knew where they were all this time?"

"Shu. Unner rock pile. No gettum away. Try fo' killum me. Tink me no savvy Ingles. Shu, me savvy heap. Killum, so!"

Gaialito leered slyly at the sheriff as he demonstrated in pantomime the sudden demise of the two murderers.

"Well, I'll be damned several times!" said the sheriff.

LATER, GAIALITO sat on the 'dobe floor of his house, arranging five hundred bright new silver dollars in neat stacks on a blanket.

He loved the smooth, cool feeling of the coins and the chink of their clinking together was the sweetest of music in his ears. There were endless possibilities in that shining heap.

And yet, in spite of his good fortune, Gaialito was puzzled. He had hung a witch that all men knew needed hanging and those crow deviled white men had cut off his hair and kept him in the "tchail house" for many long moons. Now he had slain two Mexican beasts, whom the Melikans often protected, and he was given fi' hunner dollas.

Aiel The ways of the white man are strange.

A Story of the Northwest Mounted

By A. DeHERRIES SMITH

ARCTIC ANGELS

HOWLS floated out on the thin Arctic air, filling rock walled Kannequoq Inlet with dirge-like notes. A dozen gaunt huskies padded to and fro near the red boulders to which they were tied; they eyed one another in murderous speculation, straining uselessly at the tethering sticks fastened to their shaggy necks.

Occasionally one of the animals halted its ceaseless trotting, squatted and, elevating a long wolf snout, sent out another wail to echo and re-echo back from the granite cliffs.

"Rotten! Rotten! Rotten!" Sergeant Richard Cleaver muttered to himself, striding up and down the narrow confines of the Mounted Police detachment building. "That brute Scarth is torturing those dogs just for pure devilment; can't be any other reason that I can see. For five cents I'd go down there and shoot up the whole works."

Peering through one of the little

windows, he gazed down at the trader's roof, set on a lower rock ledge, and then at the whimpering blurs beyond. A moon faced halfbreed, lounging in the post doorway, glanced up at the huskies and spat contemptuously. Apparently the man saw something humorous in the situation. Yellow teeth showed momentarily when the native tore off another mouthful of tobacco from a black plug.

Thin columns of smoke continued to well up undisturbed from the huddle of skin *tupiks*, sheltering beneath the cliffs from the ever present winds. But beyond the curling smoke there was no movement; none of the Eskimo inhabitants took any notice of the starving animals' plea for food.

With a curse, the sergeant swung away from the window to glare at Constable Timothy Noonan's thick frame stretched on his bunk.

"Helluva lot you care, you fat lobster!" Cleaver threw out at the slumbering man's round, freckled face. "You don't give a hoot about the prestige of the service, do you? Said you'd never make a dog man, and that goes! Blah!"

An angelic smile stole across the sleeper's features. He rolled over lazily, grunting his contentment. Sergeant Cleaver snorted and stamped out of the cabin, crashing the door behind him.

SERGEANT CLEAVER shrugged his khaki service tunic up on wide shoulders, staring across the inlet at the precipitous coastline beyond. Already the brown hillsides were showing red where the lichens were commencing to take on their summer hue. There was a faint hint of green at the blue white glacier's foot. A brilliant sun shone down out of an amazingly blue sky.

"Spring, all right," he mumbled to himself as gray eyes roved over the ice pans and bergs tinkling together in the bay. "Another eight months' winter over, and I ought to be tickled pink. Damn Scarth and his dogs, anyhow!"

The supply ship would probably be coming in another month or so, but he couldn't go out on leave with all these sick and starving Eskimos on his hands, the sergeant ruminated, when his gaze swung about to the huddle of *tupiks*. Had to look after the poor devils somehow.

"I'll make him feed those dogs, at any rate," he said with sudden decision.

Quick fingers fastened the glinting brass buttons of the faded tunic, as soft stepping sealskin boots carried him downward in long strides.

A sudden chorus of expectant howls broke out from the watching huskies when Cleaver passed Scarth's fish cache, and swung in at the trader's open door.

The sergeant's keen ears picked up a low whistle when he stepped into the post's dim interior and stood, motionless, waiting for his eyes to become accustomed to the gloom.

"That you, Uluk?" he queried, blundering forward.

Twin grunts answered and, following the direction, he made out two lounging blurs behind the wood heater's rounded shape.

"Look here, Scarth, you'll have to feed those dogs," Cleaver announced, pushing forward until he was looking down at the trader's narrow face and flickering eyes.

"Huh—huh," Scarth grunted, giving the faintly grinning Uluk a soft kick on the leg with his sealskin mukluks. "What the heck am I goin' to feed 'em on, eh? You Arctic angels goin' to tumble down a bunch of manna, eh?"

The trader's narrow shoulders quivered slightly. To cover the motion he jumped erect, pulling up his ever slipping and dirty mackinaw shirt. A yellow hand waved toward his empty shelves.

"Yes, I know you're traded out," Sergeant Cleaver agreed, ignoring the tone as he followed the gesture. "No grub left. You can fish though, can't you?"

"Nothin' doin'," Scarth laughed. "That's a native's job. Think I'm goin' to have the Esks see me an' lose my white man's rep? Not so's you'd notice it."

"Well, what about Uluk?"

"Uluk?" Scarth replied, a note of

feigned astonishment in his tone. "Why, the lad's half white, ain't he? Got to look after his rep too. Don't want to have the Esks see him workin'. No, sir."

The halfbreed grinned faintly in response to the trader's nudge.

"Well if it wasn't for the fact that you'd report it and I'd be replying to fool questions from headquarters for the next two years, I'd shoot your blasted huskies," Cleaver rumbled.

He wheeled away, pacing up and down the post's earthen floor, followed by two pairs of amused eyes. Only just enough dog feed left to keep the police huskies going until the supply ship got in, the Mountie reflected. Out of the question to feed Scarth's animals on his team rations. And the hungry Eskimos had eaten their sled dogs long since.

"Hey!" Scrath's thin voice came suddenly. "Lookit, Cleaver. That skin boat of your'n is the only thing left in Kannequoq that'll float. There's walrus out there on the floes. Red meat. Why don't you go out an' belt one down for the Esks? I'll buy the scraps for the dogs. How's that?"

Again Cleaver sensed thinly covered insult in the little man's tones and again he ignored it. Under other conditions he would have quickly removed the sneer from that weasel face, but now only one thought pulsed through his brain—how to feed the Eskimos and those yowling brutes up on the rocks.

FOLLOWED by twin grins of satisfaction, the Mountie padded to the door to stare out across the ice filled inlet. Yes, there were walrus out on the float ice; he had seen them through the glasses. It was as much as a man's life was worth, though, to venture out among those razor edged pans in a frail skin boat.

Cleaver clenched brown fists, swung away from the post and, padding across the ice polished rocks, reached the first of the *tupiks*.

For a moment he stood with one hand on the caribou skin that served for a door, his sunburned face wrinkled in disgust. Abominable odors floated out on the crisp air from the *tupik;* the stench of unwashed humans, half tanned deerskins, moldy furs.

Cleaver pulled out a handkerchief and, holding it across his mouth and nostrils, ducked his long body and came upright in the *tupik*. The foul smelling interior was littered with the Eskimos' priceless possessions; they were too far gone now with the coast sickness to care. Wooden pans sewn with rawhide, and stone cooking pots were thrown about in confusion. The floor was a wild jumble of feverish natives rolling about on bearskins, sealing spears, snowshoes and mukluks.

"By Christopher, they've got to have red meat or they'll all kick out," the Mountie said to himself, staring down on the emaciated, yellow faces. "Guess I've got to do it."

"Oh, Kanneyok," Cleaver called in the Innuit tongue. "I come bearing a message. Listen well, O you people of the ice."

Three tousled heads were elevated for a moment above the skins; a thin arm waved to signify that the message had been heard.

"Thus and thus," the sergeant called in Innuit through his handkerchief. "There must be red meat or you will all pass to the shadow hills. Therefore, because the great white king does not forget his people, I and the fat one go to hunt walrus. With the new sun we bring meat. I have spoken."

Faint clucking sounded when the Eskimos passed this satisfying information along. A chorus of grunts.

"That's the way to shoot it to 'em," Scarth's nasal tones came suddenly from the doorway. "You police sure knows your onions. Fall for this white king stuff, don't they? But, by cripes, you'd better make good, Cleaver, or the Esks'll give you the hee-haw from Alaska to Greenland—"

"*Anumlatciaq tamna oomiak!*" a laughing voice broke in on Scarth in the Eskimo tongue.

There followed a crisp oath from the trader, the sound of a blow, and a yelp from Uluk.

"*Anumlatciaq tamna oomiak!* The skin boat it never goes out!"

Cleaver translated the halfbreed's phrase slowly, subconsciously aware that the sick Eskimos had heard and understood the words. Several of them were sitting upright, bony faces staring over at the door flap.

"By God, I've stood all I'm going to take from you and that grinning breed of yours!" the Mountie roared, gripped by long suppressed passion.

One leap carried him across the littered *tupik*. Two hard hands fastened on Scarth's scrawny throat. The sergeant dragged the little man out into the glaring sunshine, shook him viciously for a long moment, and then sent him spinning with a well placed kick.

The trader was on his feet again in a moment, close set eyes darting fire. He opened his slit of a mouth; then thinking better of it, he wheeled away and padded off for the post, mumbling to himself.

Cleaver watched him pass out of sight; then once more he ducked back into the *tupik*, calling:

"Oh, Kanneyok, I have made a true talk; I am a redcoat and you are the children of the great white king. The skin boat goes out. There will be red meat before the sun comes again. I have spoken."

"*Ail Ail*"

A chorus of grunts answered him, but Cleaver sensed that the natives' tones lacked conviction. Swearing softly to himself, the Mountie plunged out into the clean air and made his way up to the detachment building.

"AIN'T no way for a buck to talk to his superior, but that was a damn' fool play," Constable Noonan offered from his perch on the bunk. "You got us in dutch, Sergeant dear. We'll never be able to handle the Esks again if we falls down on this job, an' I got a hunch that's what Mr. Scarth is after. Suit his tradin' fine if the natives go wild an' woolly. I ain't no Sherlock Holmes, but if this ain't a plant I'm a Hindoo philosopher."

"Oh, shut up!" Cleaver put in irritably. "I've got enough on my hands without scrapping with you. We're going out in the skin boat in the morning, ice or no ice, and we're going to bring back a walrus. I've given the king's word for that. It's getting dark. Any intention of feeding the dogs tonight?"

"Thought you said I weren't no dog man—"

"You've got enough brains to feed them some tallow, at any rate," the sergeant cut in on him. "Go out, Timothy Noonan, or I'll throw you out!"

Constable Noonan dodged about the heater, grabbed his parka off a peg and slid through the door. Once outside he listened for a moment to the ice pans' tinkling and the mournful wailing of Scarth's huskies. Then with an expressive shoulder shrug, Noonan made his way up to the little storehouse.

The key grated in the lock, and with that well known sound eager whines burst from the dogs penned in the corral. Scarth's starving brutes heard those expectant whimpers and filled the night air with agonized howling.

It was a good three hours later when Noonan pushed in the door of the detachment building and grinned over at his chief. Cleaver was stretched on his bunk, khaki shirted, body bathed in yellow lamplight, and deep in "Soldiers Three". The sergeant threw the book down and glared at the rubicund face.

"Look here, you nighthawk," he called. "Haven't you got any savvy at all? You stay away from that girl, or I'll—"

"Nix on the gentle sentiment tonight," the constable broke in. "Love's off; murder's on. Been prowlin'. We won't possess any skin boat in the mornin'; the Esks will have it that the great white king ain't the caribou's chin whiskers no longer, an' Scrath will be known as the very strong man from here to Hoboken."

"What's the matter with you?" Cleaver

boomed, jerking bolt upright. "Scarth wouldn't dare break up that boat; not after that three months I got him for monkeying with our schooner last year."

"Oh, you'd be surprised!" Noonan mocked his superior. "There's more ways of killin' a polar bear than choking it with chocolate éclairs. Climb into your parka an' mukluks an' we'll take in the movie. It's a real fifty cent show. Come on."

MUMBLING uncomplimentary things regarding his companion's mentality, Cleaver vaulted off the bunk, pulled on his sealskin boots and parka, and followed Noonan's squat figure out into the night.

A bright moon bathed Kannequoq Inlet, flooding the open spaces with soft radiance, softening the rugged coast's raw contours. The two men stood motionless, ears filled with the subdued tinkling of the ice pans and the distant honking of some migrant geese seeking open water.

Noonan caught the other man's sleeve and pointed down to Scarth's trading post. Cleaver nodded. Yes, the lights were out—and for the first time in a month the unfortunate huskies had ceased howling. He turned to peer down at the constable, but Tim avoided the glance, padding off and beckoning his comrade to follow.

Swinging wide of the settlement below, the little man made his way over the moonlight bathed ridges until at length he arrived at one of the giant boulders that studded the beach. Beyond him, and less than a dozen yards away, the police skin boat lay overturned on the white sands.

"Well?" the sergeant's glance read as he lowered himself to the cold shingle alongside his comrade.

Noonan made no offer to enlighten him, signaling for silence.

The sergeant and the constable lay motionless, staring up at the stars.

All at once the constable twisted over on his face, when Cleaver's hard hand gripped his thick arm.

A new sound had been added to the faint night noises. Both Mounties knew what it was; the soft slithering of sealskin boots over the rocks.

Then suddenly two upright figures were blurred against the ice filled waters when Scarth and the halfbreed stepped down from the rocks and padded over to the skin boat. Each man was leading a number of the trader's huskies.

"*Pst!*"

Noonan pulled Cleaver's head down to him, whispering:

"You've seen hungry dogs up here chewin' the rawhide lashings off sleds, ain't you? You've seen 'em eatin' the sides outa skin houses, an' gnawin' old sealskin boots? Sure. Well, now they're changin' the diet; goin' to scoff our old skin boat."

Cleaver's right hand jerked back toward his revolver holster, but before it reached the weapon Tim's fingers fastened on his wrist.

"Not yet! Not yet!" Tim Noonan urged. "See the whole show. Comic's comin'. Savvy what it is, Dick? We've given the king's word that there'll be red meat for the sick Esks in the mornin' an' Scarth has passed the talk around that there won't be any. If there ain't no meat our name is mud, frozen mud at that. An' how the heck can we get walrus without a boat?"

Cleaver glared down at the constable's grinning face. What was he repeating that for, and why the blazes was he so happy about it?

The sergeant wrenched his hand free, thrusting the revolver forward. At the same moment a low oath sounded from one of the two men, and Cleaver's trigger finger relaxed.

SCARTH tugged the lines off the dogs he was leading, kicking one of the starving brutes toward the walrus hide covering the *oomiak*. But instead of rushing forward and tearing at the skin the dog squatted on the shingle, staring up at its master. Three more of the released huskies lay down and curled up for immediate sleep. Some of the others

commenced to wander along the beach. None of the animals took the least notice of the skin boat.

Scarth's rumbled cursing and the halfbreed's clucking sounded dimly in the sergeant's ears as he rolled over to stare in amazement at the bursting Noonan.

"Oh, my fat sides," Tim groaned. "Seventeen dried fish, eleven tins of bully beef, five lumps of tallow, an' a chunk of pemmican as big as a battleship. An' they polished off the whole works. An' now Scarth's offerin' 'em a dried up old walrus skin for dessert. A dog's life, that's what it is."

Sudden realization stabbed Cleaver's mind. Tim had sneaked out and fed Scarth's starving huskies so that they would not attack the skin boat!

"Listen," Noonan's voice came again. "Yesterday a big floe grounded beyond the point. There was a walrus on it as big as the side of a house. Uluk shot it. Get the idea? With the skin boat gone we couldn't pull the Arctic angel stuff, and when we fell down on the job Scarth would lug in his walrus an' get the glad hand from the Esks. Cripes, you're in a hurry, eh?"

Cleaver had vaulted from the icy ground with a catlike leap. As Noonan lumbered to his feet he heard Scarth's surprised cry and the halfbreed's yelp of dismay.

The trader threw himself face down on the beach when the white faced sergeant raced across the slippery shingle. A single lunge brought Scarth to his feet.

Then sounded the slithering of Noonan's mukluks on the shingle as the little man raced after the grunting halfbreed.

"I take it all back about the dogs, Timsy," Cleaver yelled at the flying figure. "Damn it, I'll recommend you for corporal's stripes for this!"

"Keep 'em!" Noonan's voice panted. "I'm the detective sergeant of this man's army, an' that's good enough for me. All right, you blubber chewer, try a taste of that!"

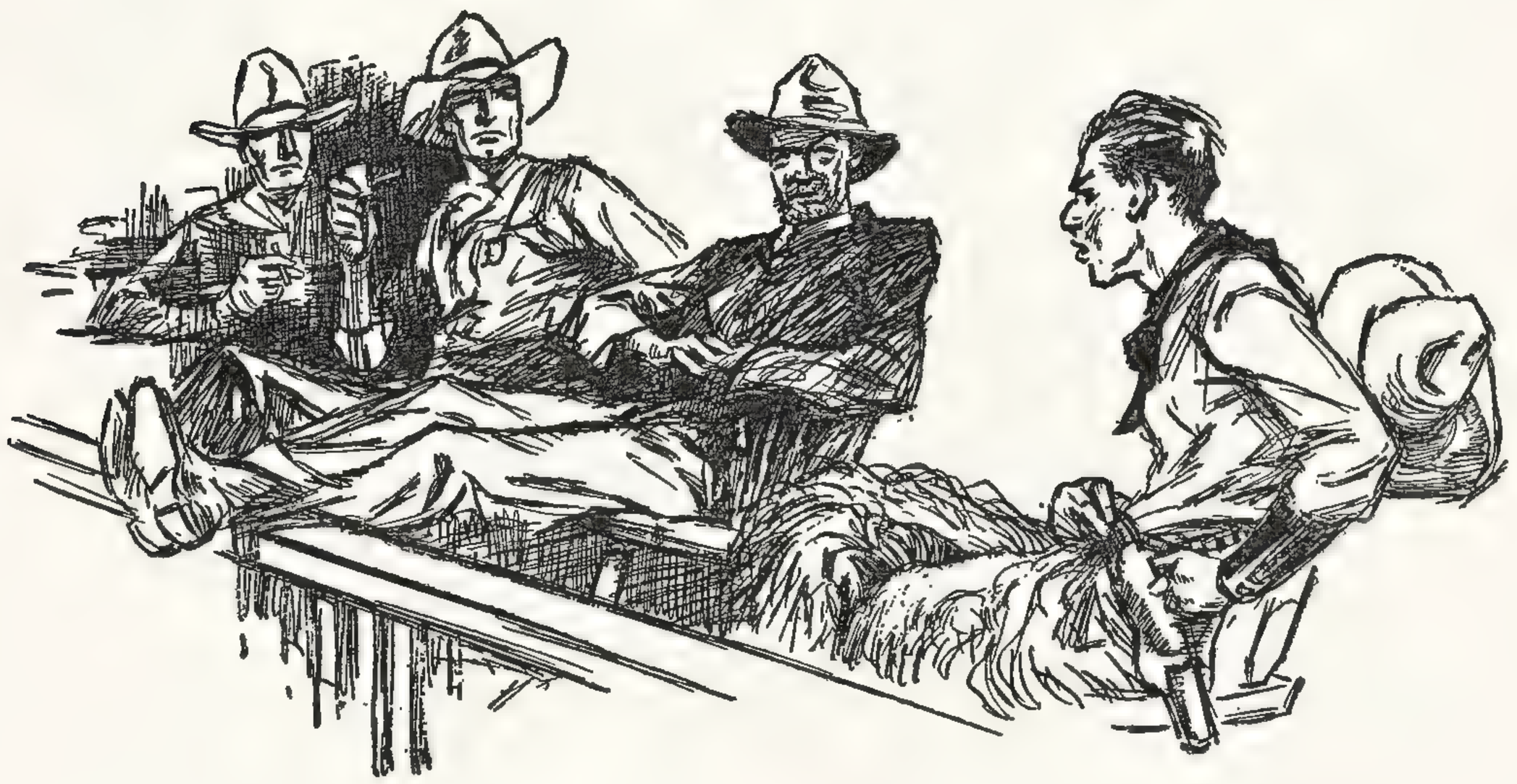
Whug! Whug!

Cleaver laughed softly, turning back to the squirming Scarth.

"Look here, you insignificant fragment of decayed whale meat," he growled at the trader. "You're too small to pound, but I have something nice in store for you. It'll be daylight in an hour. You and the breed will cut up that walrus and bring it down here. Then you'll keep on making soup for the Esks until they're well again. On top of that you're going to wash all their clothes and clean up the *tupiks*. That's slow motion death, if you ask me. Not a word, you rat. Move!"

As he shoved Scarth forward, Cleaver saw his comrade come upright and fan himself vigorously. Surrounding him were four of the satiated huskies. They sniffed gratefully at Noonan's legs.

PICTURE *of a* LIAR



One was a garrulous porch philosopher, the other a shiftless young ne'er-do-well; but then they joined forces——

By JOHN WEBB

TEL BROWN settled deeper into his splint bottom chair. He sighed wearily and shifted his heels on the porch railing. He ripped a splinter of pine from the nearest porch post, placed it between his big white teeth and gazed drowsily and with little interest out over the little cow town's dusty main street. He sighed again.

"By gee," he drawled, "I'm tired."

Young Bucky Keys perched precariously on the railing with his back against a post and one leg outstretched to the arm of Tel Brown's rickety chair, sniffed grumpily and cast a look to burly Dave Hamstetter, the blacksmith, who had come from his shop down the street for a breath of air.

Dave grinned. Bucky sniffed again.

"Lazy, you mean," he said.

Gangling, bony Tel Brown nodded in perfect agreement.

"Durn 'f I ain't. But laziness, boy, is a cosmic—"

"Law! Yeah, I know. You told me forty-seven million times. Don't care anyhow. What I'm tryin' to make you listen to—"

"Shush-shush, boy! Don't go makin' a durn nuisance of yourself. We was talkin' about laziness bein' a cosmic law."

"To hell with the cosmic law!" Bucky grunted wrathfully.

"What is it anyhow?" asked Dave Hamstetter. "This here cosmic law, I mean?"

"A law of the cosmos," explained Tel Brown.

"Oh," said Dave brightly. "Never was much on law stuff. Sam Schaefer, though, what used to be assayer over at Sunbake, he was purty good. So many laws nowaday a man can't keep track of 'em."

"Sandhill," drawled Tel Brown with seeming irrelevance, "is what you would call a typical cow country town. Every cow town's gotta have a blacksmith, a sheriff with whiskers like a walrus, a buzzard in human form who runs a den of iniquity where poor fools of men drink and gamble, a white faced, boiled shirted, frock coated shark who runs the games and takes the money from said poor fools, a bad man with his gun butts all saw-toothed with notches, a honest old cow-man who had a weak chinned wastrel of a son, a goat whiskered ole gent who runs the gen'ral store and has a nice shady porch with a rail for your feet, and on that porch, in a chair like this'n', is gotta sit the village loafer."

Young Bucky had sat up straight and there was sudden interest in his eyes.

"That bad man, Tel, and that young what you call 'im with the weak chin—"

"I," continued the gangling idler, "am the village loafer. And lemme tell you, gents, this town's lucky. Ain't no town got a steadier and more confirmed loafer'n what this'n' has. I been workin' at this vocation—a sorta profession it is, and I take pride in it—for a long time, and though I ain't a man to brag—"

"Aw, chuck that slop in a can," growled Bucky. "Gettin' you started on anything but talkin' is shore a job. I wanta talk to you about poor ole John Shetlow, out there at the Crowfoot, and that ungrateful hound of a son o' his, and see can't we figger out some way to help him out—"

HE BROKE off to stare across the street, where two men had just come from Coleman's Bar and were standing together on the high wooden walk. One was Texas Jack McConnell, who had come up from the South a few months before and was reputed to be a killer and an outlaw. He was a tall, lean, hawk nosed man with stringy black hair and skin like dirty ivory. It was said that his name was not McConnell at all and that he was a Border breed whose former haunts had become too hot for him, and that in order to depart from those haunts he had been forced to kill a town marshal and wound a deputy.

All of which, of course, was mostly rumor, but with a basis of truth, and one thing was certain: Texas Jack McConnell —to call him by the name he said was his—was tough, hard and ruthless; a bad man to cross. The two big bone handled weapons he carried were those of a gunman, and he wore them in a businesslike way, slung low and thonged to his thighs. And the cold black eyes in the ivory mask were never still, but continuously alive with a suspicious alertness.

The other man was Frank Shetlow, a lumpy, awkward looking man in his early twenties, with a round chin and a soft, loose mouth. Just now he needed a shave, his brown hair was unkempt, his brown eyes were red rimmed and he hiccoughed loudly. He spoke with a good natured bluster that seemed unnatural; he made one think of a half grown youth boasting and cursing in an attempt to sound like a man.

"Better take me with you, Jack," he was saying. "Can't tell what you might run into."

The ivory faced gunman smiled thinly, shook his head and said something that could not be heard across the street. Plainly he saw through Shetlow and regarded him with tolerant contempt.

Frank Shetlow laughed raucously and slapped Texas Jack on the shoulder.

"Oh, I reckon you can take care of yourself around here, Jack. Haw-haw! And if they get too many for you, Jack, just 'member you got friends."

Texas Jack's lean smile twisted again across his yellow face. From the bar had come three men—Coleman himself, a burly, greasy looking man with thick shoulders and the marks and mannerisms of a rough and tumble adept; Hole Card

Moore, immaculate in stiff shirt and Prince Albert, a professional gambler with the reputation of being swift and sudden and utterly reckless and ruthless once he started; and Sam Murdick, a silent, morose little man who had come from the South with Texas Jack and was the tall outlaw's right hand man.

Texas Jack looked past Frank Shetlow and winked. The bulky saloon owner laughed outright. The wiry, leathery, little gunman jerked up a corner of his mouth and spat. The stone faced gambler, standing with his coat back and his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his brocaded white vest, merely glanced slantwise at young Frank and winked.

TEXAS JACK gestured with his head. Sam Murdick strode forward and joined his leader at the hitch rack. They untethered their broncs, leaped to their backs and were away down the street, leaving behind them whirling clouds of dust. Coleman and his dealer turned back into the bar. On the walk, Frank Shetlow, wavering drunkenly, straightened his hat, brushed at his clothes and seemed trying to pull himself together.

"What I'd like to do to him," muttered Dave Hemstetter, "is kick his pants off."

"I'd like to slap a gun barrel over his skull," growled Bucky. "Him runnin' around like that and hangin' out with them lizards, playin' up to 'em, and his pop layin' out to the Crowfoot with a bullet hole in him."

"I ain't heard the inside of that," said Dave. "How'd it happen?"

"Way ole Shetlow told me," said Bucky, "is that 'bout a year ago he hadda have some money, and like a fool he went and borried it off'n Coleman. Last week he managed to get the last of the money together, after workin' and scrapin' and worryin' like anything, and told Coleman he was comin' in with it to pay him and get back his note. On the way in he was held up and robbed, and when he went for his gun he was shot in the back. Just luck he's alive."

"Gosh, I bet—"

"Shore, Coleman got it. He sent Texas Jack and that little rat sidekick o' his out to waylay ole Shetlow. But how you gonna prove it? He don't on'y get the money, but he gets the Crowfoot too, 'cause ole John Shetlow's note's a'most due and he can't borry money to meet it to save his neck, way he's tied up with mortgages and all. He's gonna lose the ranch to Coleman shore, and after the way he's been workin' all these years!"

"Work," murmured Tel Brown as he abstractedly plucked off another pine sliver for his tireless jaws. "No good ever come of it."

"Aw, shut up," snapped Bucky. "Ole Pop Shetlow's gonna lose his place, just when he's gettin' ahead o' the game. If you'd wake up and suggest somethin'—You got more brains'n all the rest of us put together, when you wanta use 'em—and I thought Pop Shetlow was a friend o' yourn!"

Tel Brown sighed. He chewed slower and slower, and finally stopped.

Bucky sat staring into the dusty road. But he didn't see the road. He saw old Pop Shetlow, big, gaunt, blunt of speech and gruff of manner, but a man with the eyes of a wistful child; a grizzly with a thorn in its paw, but with a heart of gold.

"I've known Pop since I was a kid," mused Bucky, "and he was allus good to me. And now—now—"

"Coleman about runs things in this town," the blacksmith was saying glumly. "Even that mistake of a sheriff."

Sheriff Twig, a coward and the joke of the valley, had been a compromise candidate at the last election and Fate, in a moment of sardonic humor, had put him in office. He was a political accident.

"What gets me," said Bucky, "is Frank Shetlow hangin' round with that gang and slappin' 'em on the back, when everybody knows it was them held up the ole man, even if it can't be proved. Poor Pop's shore got a son to be proud of!"

"One look at him," said the blacksmith, "and you can tell what he is—a jigger with the guts of a she mouse and the

decency of a cockroach tryin' to act like Billy the Kid. His makeup's wrote all over him."

"Shore is," said Bucky. "One look at him and I get a pain in my belly."

TEL BROWN spat out a mouthful of well chewed wood pulp and looked up at the speckless sky.

"Back in Pennsylvania," he drawled, once more with seeming irrelevance, "the' was a fella come to town with a wife and two kids and bought a little place back offa the main road and worked like anything fixin' it up. Funny fella he was; dark and silent and kinda shifty eyed, and when you looked at him you got the idee his head was fulla slimy secrets, and the people wouldn't 'a' been s'prized to hear he was Jack the Ripper or somebody. He talked nice and pleasant and all, but ev'rybody said he done that because he was cunnin'.

"Well, one day his wife and two children disappeared, and a little while later a farmer drivin' by with a load o' cabbages and stuff happened to stop off and walk around back, where the' was a stream, to get a bucket o' water for his hoss, and durn' if he didn't come plumb on three new graves!"

"Doggone!" breathed the blacksmith. "The son of a gun!"

Bucky glanced briefly at the gangling loafer, then turned back to his contemptuous watching of Frank Shetlow, who was trying with poor success to button his vest.

"Well," Tel Brown went on, "the farmer he f'got all about his hoss needin' water and wallops him all the way to town, and in 'bout half a hour the' was fifteen-twenty gents headin' for that place, and some of 'em had ropes under their coats.

"Well, they find this fella—name was Jones or somethin', call him Jones—they find him hoein' beans or somethin', and they say to him, 'Hey, you, where's your wife and kids?' "

"Well, he looks at 'em kinda scared, and wets his lips and gulps, and after a long while he tells 'em his wife and kids've gone to some little town nobody ever heard of, where he says she was born and brought up, and where she'd got a uncle or somethin' that's maybe dead or don't live there any more, and he can't tell 'em where she'd stayin' 'cause she was gonna look for that uncle, and 'f she can't find him she was gonna stay at some hotel or maybe board with somebody, and he ain't heard from her yet, and the more he talks the worse it sounds. Nobody b'lieves him, o' course, shifty eyed and all like he is, and finally they says to him, 'What about them three graves back there, and the' ain't been no death notice or doctor or anything. How come?' "

The blacksmith, hanging open mouthed on every word, blinked and leaned forward. Bucky was still watching the fumbling man across the street.

"Betcha that hit him between the eyes!" the blacksmith said. "Go on, Tel."

"Well, Jones he stands on one foot and then the other, and looks around quick like he was gonna run, but they was all around him and all he could do was gulp and pull at his collar like it was chokin' and if you didn't know what it was all about you'd think he was bashful or somethin'.

"Well, after a lotta gulpin' and chokin' and lookin' around he stutters out that back were they come from—some little town in Maine—they had lived in a ole house that'd been built way back in Rev'lutionary times, and hadda lotta old trees and vines and stuff around, and was real purty, and had what he called a atmosphere about it, and in the back the' was three graves where three o' George Washington's or somebody's soldiers had been buried, and he said him and his wife had got married in that house and brought up their children there, and they got kinda friendly with them graves and useta go out on warm nights and sit around and talk about God and things—"

"Sit around graves at night and talk!" gasped the blacksmith. "Go on—go on, Tel."

"Well, this jigger Jones talked like a

downright liar, stumblin' and stutterin', with them little squint eyes of his lookin' this way and that and ev'rywhere but at you, and he kept backin' up and I reckon he'd 'a' make a break for it and maybe got away if they hadn't watched him so close."

"But about them graves? Go on, Tel!"

"Yeh. Well, he says his wife was kinda homesick livin' in this new place, and she missed them graves, 'cause she was kinda friendly like with 'em; and he says he was tryin' to make the place as much like the ole place as he could, and to s'prize his wife while she was away visitin' that uncle that was maybe dead, he digs them graves, so they can sit out nights and hold hands and talk about God and all."

"Gosh! Did he expect anybody to b'lieve that?"

"Nobody did, anyhow, 'cause he had liar wrote all over him, way he talked and acted and all, and the more he talked the worse it got.

"Well, the fellas from town they started feelin' for their ropes, but first they thinks they'll open up them graves and get out the bodies, and they gets a pick and shovels and goes to work, and when they digs down far enough they finds—"

BUCKY suddenly slid from the porch railing and stood waiting with a dark look on his face. Coming toward them from across the street was Frank Shetlow, forced nonchalance in his manner and a stupid grin on his face.

"Go on—go on!" cried the blacksmith. "What'd they find in them graves, Tel?"

"Wait a minute," cut in Bucky, his gaze on Shetlow. "Le's hear what this thing's got to say."

"A-a-aw," grumbled the blacksmith, but after a hopeful glance at Tel Brown he sank into sullen resignation.

"Hy!" greeted Frank Shetlow. "Hot, ain't it? Ain't it hot? Gosh, it's hot."

"Yeh, hot," said Tel Brown. " 'S heat does it, I reckon. I allus kinda thought was the heat made me so durn' tired."

He looked expectantly at Bucky, waited a moment and then nodded agreement just as if the young puncher had spoken.

"Yeh, lazy it is. Laziness, boy, is a cosmic—"

"Aw, shut up!" flared Bucky. "Use a little common sense, will you?"

"Ain't no such thing. Sense is the rarest thing the' is."

Bucky ignored him. He looked at Frank Shetlow as if about to spring at that man's throat.

"Texas Jack McConnell just left," said Shetlow. "He's a salty jigger, Texas Jack is. I was drinkin' with him—"

"Braggin' 'bout it, are you?" cut in Bucky. "And your pop in bed—shot in the back."

Shetlow blinked his red rimmed eyes.

"Gosh, I ain't no doctor. Couldn't do anything for him if I was sittin' there day and night. Anyhow, he's outa danger now and gettin' better."

"Well," said Bucky scornfully, "if it was my pop I'd shore cut down on the jiggers that shot him in the back. I wouldn't be drinkin' with 'em and tellin' 'em what great gents they are."

"Huh? Whadda you mean?"

"You know what I mean, cowboy. Ain't no doubt o' who shot your pop. Everybody knows 'at. It's as shore as—as that you got a yella streak down your back!"

Frank Shetlow gasped. He stepped back and his hand hovered over his gun. Dave Hamstetter scrambled to one side, and Bucky, seeing out of the corner of his eye that Tel Brown did not move, himself shifted to one side so as to draw aside of the line of fire.

For a moment something blazed in Shetlow's bleary eyes, then he gulped, wet his lips and allowed his trembling gun hand to drop weakly at his side.

"You—you ain't got no right to talk like that," he faltered.

He rubbed at his bristly cheeks and his eyes shifted from one to the other of the three men.

"I—I ain't doin' nothin' wrong," he stammered. "Texas Jack's a—a good fella, and—and—"

Despite the level to which he appeared to have sunk, it was plain that he wanted the good opinion of these three men—three men who, despite their disparity in other respects, had honor and courage. He looked longest of all at Tel Brown, the wise and sometimes militant loafer whom the biggest men in the valley treated with respect and sometimes deference. The bony idler was slow to start, but once under way he was a swift and tireless fighting machine on the side of right. Tel Brown, for all his avowed bone laziness, was a man of consequence.

"I—I DON'T want you to think that—that—" A speculative light came into the bleary eyes. "You see, I'm makin' b'lieve that—that I'm friendly with 'em, and soon's I find where it is I'm gonna—gonna steal that note o' Pop's, even if I have to battle for it, and—"

"Aw, get away from me!" cut in Bucky. "You oughta been put in a sack and drowned when you was young. G'wan away from me!"

Again flared that light in Shetlow's eyes, and again it died. He stood there a few seconds, gulping and quivering, then turned and stumbled back across the street to Coleman's.

"That polecat!" growled Bucky. "Hangin' round with the men that shot and robbed his pop!" He swung suddenly about upon Tel Brown, who had not moved from his chair, but sat chewing on his wad of wood like a contented cow. "Why'n heck didn't you move? S'pose he'd got up nerve 'nough to sling lead?"

Tel Brown yawned.

"Knowed he wouldn't shoot. Had it figgered out."

"Can't allus tell," put in Dave Hamstetter. "Sometimes a coward'll go off his head and be more dangerous'n a brave man."

"Knowed he wouldn't draw—just knowed it." Tel Brown jerked his head at Bucky and continued speaking to the blacksmith. "Trouble with this fella is he can't think real well. When somebody pulls a raw one on a friend o' his, all he can think of to do is grab that thing and start chuckin' hot lead. Boy, why don't you just sit around and think a little, let things kinda seep in through that skull o' your'n? A man's brain can't absorb any facts while he's runnin' around with a gun in his hand. 'Sides, usin' up energy like that is runnin' against the laws o' nature, and if you keep it up—"

"Aw, save that garbage!" broke in Bucky. "Ole Pop Shetlow's a friend o' mine, and now he's in trouble and ain't got nobody to help him but me."

"And me," said Tel Brown slowly. "Pop's a friend o' mine too, from back in the ole days."

"Mine too," put in Dave Hamstetter. "I'd do a lot for Pop."

Bucky snorted.

"Yeh, both of you! Listen—don't we know Coleman set Texas Jack and that side kick o' his'n on to Pop Shetlow? And don't we know Coleman's got the money, after payin' off Texas Jack?"

"Reckon the' ain't no doubt o' that," said Tel Brown, and the blacksmith nodded.

"And don't we know Pop's note is over there in Coleman's safe?"

"Don't know it, boy, but I reckon it is."

"A'right! Then what'sa matter with us goin' over there and gettin' that note, if we have to smear Coleman and his whole durn' gang?"

"The's so many things the matter with it," drawled Tel Brown, "that I'm too doggone tired to point 'em out. Gettin' the note's a'right, but it calls for brain work and cunning, not brute strength and dumbness. Le's just sit around awhile and think—and rest. I'm tired."

"Tired! La—"

"Same thing. Laziness is a cosmic—"

"Save it! Come on, Dave; le's you and me get away from him. 'At big clown makes me sick!"

Dave hesitated, but at last started off. Then, at a sudden thought, he stopped and swung back.

"Hey, Tel! About them graves—what'd they find in them three graves?"

"Graves? What graves?"

"Why, them three graves—you 'member that story you was tellin' us."

"Oh, that!" Tel Brown yawned and settled lower in his chair. "Le's see, where was I? Ho-hum! Gosh, I'm tired —yeah, lazy, I mean. Graves, you say? Three of 'em? Three graves?"

"Yeah, Tel, don't you 'emmber—"

"Aw, come on," growled Bucky impatiently. "Come on, Dave. Let him sit on the back of his neck and die. Come on."

Tel Brown had closed his eyes, but his jaws champed on. Dave Hamstetter, with a sigh of disappointment, turned reluctantly and, grumbling, followed Bucky down the street.

IT WAS long past midnight. The crowd at Coleman's had thinned, leaving only here and there, at the bar or at the scattered tables, a befuddled cowboy or townsman in muddled conversation or half asleep. Hole Card Moore had closed his game and was talking at the bar with thick shouldered Coleman and two of the latter's black browed henchmen.

Texas Jack McConnell had come in with Sam Murdick and they were having a drink on the house at the end of the bar, with Gimpy Carr, one of Coleman's bartenders, a wizened little man who had known Dodge City at its worst and boasted that the bullet he still carried in his hip was from the gun of the famous Bat Masterson himself.

In the back room sat Bucky Keys and Dave Hamstetter, killing time over their drinks and talking in low tones. At a table in a corner was young Frank Shetlow, alone; his hat was on the floor, his face was buried in his arms on the scarred and dirty table and he was snoring fitfully.

Tel Brown had stepped in an hour or so ago and had a drink with Shetlow, and after a short, low voiced talk, crossed the room to Hamstetter and Bucky and gripped the latter by the shoulder.

"A man can't trust you," he said. "You mean well, boy, and you got a durn' good heart, but yo're too light on the trigger. You're so durn' hot headed—" He yawned. " 'S late. And I'm t—lazy, I mean. Guess I'm go put the body to bed. G'night, gents."

"Hey!" cried Dave Hamstetter. "About them three graves—what'd they find in 'em?"

"Graves? Three graves? Oh, them three graves! Well, this fella come and bought a little place just outside o' town, and he had a wife and two young 'uns, and—"

"Aw, you told us all that, Tel. No sense in goin' all over it again."

"That's right— Where was I?"

"You was right where the gang o' men with the ropes thinks they'll open up the graves and get out the bodies, and they digs and digs, and then—then you stopped."

"Stopped, huh? Right there?" Tel Brown studied a matchstick, then placed it between his teeth. "Funny I stopped right there. What'd I stop for?"

"Why — uh — Frank Shetlow come across, and—aw, hell, what's wrong with you?"

"Gosh, been up all day, sittin' round and all. But le's see—oh, them graves! Well, they digs and digs, and finally, when they was gettin' tired—lazy, I mean—they're down about three-four feet, or maybe five, and they don't find nothin', so they keeps right on, diggin' and diggin'—"

Wham!

Splinters flew from the table; there sounded the *phut!* of a bullet in the tongue and groove wall. Tel Brown was down, crouched close to the floor, one of his long, black Frontier Model single actions in his hand and his gray eye glued on the window through which the shot had come. A startled five seconds, then came the trampling of feet from the barroom and cautious heads appeared in the doorway.

Bucky and Dave Hamstetter had upended the thick oak table and were huddled behind it. Across the room, Frank Shetlow sat straight in his chair, his lips

tight and his eyes staring, and Bucky, with a snort, noted that the young puncher had a hand on his gun.

Tel Brown scuddled across the room, and when out of line with the window, stood upright. He chuckled.

"Some drunk swingin' a hogleg promiskus," he drawled. "Burnt my ear, the son of a gun! Somebody better go out and quiet him down with a gun bar'l." He grinned to Coleman, then looked past the bulky saloon owner and let his gaze travel over the men in the bar; he seemed to be checking them off. "Reckon I'll high tail it for home and bed," he said then, " 'fore I get m'self knocked over by accident—or otherwise. G'night, gents."

HE SCREWED up one side of his face to Bucky and the blacksmith and ambled out. A man entered and said the street outside was clear, that the drunk, or whoever had fired the shot, had departed. Bucky and Dave righted the table and resumed their seats. The curious ones drifted out to the bar. Frank Shetlow slumped back into his sodden attitude; in a little while his head bobbed, and he laid it upon his arms and snored.

"Sometime," muttered the blacksmith "I'm gonna hear 'bout them bodies they dug up—maybe. It's a good story, way he tells it, but the' ain't no end. Nothin' happens."

"That fella!" grunted Bucky. "A durn' good man, Tel is, and a whizzer when you get him goin', but gosh, time you do that you're all weak with exhaustion. And then he goes and shows you you been wrong all the time. He's always right, though, durn him!" he added.

"On'y this time," said the blacksmith, "it seems like he ain't never gonna get goin'."

"Seems as though. And we gotta get—" he looked cautiously around and dropped his voice—"we gotta get that note for ole Pop Shetlow. His son ain't no use to him and it's up to me—us."

"Shore. When my fust wife got sick it was ole Pop give me money to send her East to a hospital. And she never come back," Dave added sadly.

"Died, huh?"

"No, run off with a carpenter. And my second wife—"

"Never mind her—we gotta get that note for ole Pop Shetlow. When I was a kid he fired a no good cow nurse that kicked my bronc, and once he give me a .22 rifle and a box o' shells. If you was in trouble I'd help you, and if I was in trouble you'd help me, and if Tel Brown was in trouble we'd both help him; now ole Pop is in trouble and—"

"We gotta help him," said Dave heartily. "Shore. But how we gonna do it?"

They spoke in whispers. The note, they felt certain, was in Coleman's safe, in a small room above; a room that Coleman, for lack of a room downstairs, used as an office. When things quieted down and Coleman turned in—he slept upstairs in a room at the back—they would slip up to the office and get the note from the safe. If the safe were locked, they would try to open it—Dave had some knowledge of safe locks, though not a great deal—and if they failed to open it they would take safe and all.

" 'S on'y a little thing," said Bucky. "Weighs maybe three hundred pound—no more. I can lift a hundred fifty pound and you might lift a hundred fifty—"

"I can lift more'n that. Once I lifted a anvil weighin'—"

"A'right—a'right; you can lift the whole durn' thing by yourself. Don't make no difference to me. We'll chuck it out the winder and drag it down to your shop and open it there."

"With a fourteen pound maul. First we'll knock the knob off."

"Yeah, but le's get the durn' thing first," said Bucky. "Say, the bar's about empty, 'cept for Texas Jack and them; le's start gettin' cunnin', like Tel Brown said."

COLEMAN'S two black browed henchmen slouched into the rear room. They glanced at Frank Shetlow, laughed and passed into a narrow, dark hall at the rear, and in a mo-

ment could be heard clumping upstairs, where they slept. Through the open doorway the two schemers in the back room could see Coleman, his powerful shoulders hunched over the bar, talking with Texas Jack and little Sam Murdick, the two gunmen from the South. Behind the bar wizened Gimpy Carr wiped glasses automatically and listened to the talk.

Coleman, McConnell, Murdick and Carr—four of them. And Hole Card Moore, who had gone out but would be back, made five. And with the two men upstairs, seven. Seven tough men, all dangerous. Seven against two. If the two should make a single false step . . .

"We gotta be careful," whispered Dave. "If we should get caught up in that room—"

"Ain't likely, but if we should, we just gotta start pumpin' lead and keep on pumpin' till the' ain't nothin' left to chuck it at. Come on, fella."

There were two doors in the back room that could not be seen from the bar, a door opening upon the side street and one leading into the narrow hall where was the stairs. Bucky and Dave arose together, scraped back their chairs and, after a moment of whispering, walked boldly and loudly toward the side door.

Frank Shetlow's snoring ceased abruptly. He shifted restlessly, rolled his head, then settled down again. Dave and Bucky halted by the side door. Bucky opened the door part of the way, left it thus and then both tiptoed to the hall door and slipped silently into the darkness.

In the blackness of the narrow hall, Bucky stopped and gripped Dave's arm. Keeping out of sight, he peered back into the room they had left. There was something, a vague tenseness, in Shetlow's attitude that he did not like; the young puncher's position did not seem that of a sleeping man, even a drunk one. So Bucky watched, puzzled and suspicious.

"Hey, Gimpy," came Coleman's heavy voice from the bar, "give us that bottle—my bottle. And some glasses. Le's sit in the back— Oh, h'lo, there! Good job you done—like hell!"

Some one had come in; by Coleman's words and tone, Hole Card Moore, the gambler. He answered short and quick, but in a low voice, and there followed gruff, angry words that Bucky could not distinguish.

AT THAT instant Frank Shetlow got to his feet. And sober he was—cold sober! Bucky knew that at a glance.

He strode swiftly but noiselessly across the floor and did not waver. He went to the door, thrust it open and stepped out.

"By golly!" gasped Bucky. "He ain't drunk at all! What's he up to? See that, Dave?"

"Why, he was playin' drunk! And—and what now?"

"I dunno. Whadda you s'spose he's up to? I don't savvy 'at fella a-tall. But we can't stop now! We gotta work fast, Dave! Come on!"

They heard Coleman and the others enter the back room as they went cautiously but quickly up the stairs. They reached the upper hall, turned to the left, and Bucky, in the lead, felt his way along the wall till his groping hand came in contact with a door.

Softly he opened it. With Dave at his elbow he stepped within, closed the door softly and struck a match.

This was the office. It was a small room containing a desk littered with papers, pens, pencils and cigar stubs, a table, several chairs and, in a corner near the single window, the little safe.

And the door of the safe stood open.

THE MATCH went out and darkness filled the room again, and then they saw a slender yellow line in the floor and moved softly over to it. It was light from below, shining up through a crack in a split board.

Voices came up to them—

"Stand up, take careful aim with all the time you need—and miss!"

This was Coleman's voice, and the one

that answered was Hole Card Moore's.

"He moved, I tell you! I had my gun lined right between his ears, and just as I fired he moved his head without any warning. Then he dropped to the floor. I thought I'd got him till Murdick came out and told me I'd missed."

"Then what's you do?"

"I waited across from his shack, thinking I'd get him for certain when he came home, but he didn't show up. And I couldn't find him anywhere. He just stepped out of the bar and disappeared!"

"I'm afraid of him." This was Coleman speaking again. "On'y man in the valley I am afraid of. Tel Brown's a curly wolf with a brain like a fox. He sits over there day after day, lookin' and listenin' and thinkin', and I know damn' well he's doin' a lotta thinkin' about me. He gives me the shivers. Ain't afraid of him personal, but when a man keeps starin' at you, and you know he's thinkin' and schemin'—"

He broke off, and in a moment he went on:

"You fellas are shore a help. Yeah! But when we got Shetlow's money I noticed you was all lined up for your cut!"

"Who got it?" came the voice of Texas Jack, the ivory skinned gunman from the South. "I thought me and Sam got it."

"On my tip, yeah. And you on'y made half a job of it. Shoot a man, go through him, take off his money belt, and don't see he's on'y wounded!"

"I told you before," snapped Texas Jack, "that the' was a couple punchers comin' along the road and we hadda high tail into the mesquite to keep from bein' seen. 'Sides, ole Shetlow was unconscious and bleedin' hard and I thought shore he'd be dead before they could get him fixed up."

"I don't think he rec'nized us," put in Sam Murdick.

"Yes, he did," contradicted Texas Jack. "He got a good look at us just before he went unconscious. But looks like he didn't tell nobody—'less it was that barfly son o' his'n."

"What would he tell *him* for?" snorted Coleman. "What could Frank Shetlow do? We afraid o' him?"

They laughed.

"But s'pose," put in Texas Jack, "he told Frank and Frank went and told this here Tel Brown you been talkin' about?"

"Huh?" Coleman's voice carried a startled note. "D'you think—if he did—"

There was a moment of silence, then Coleman's voice again:

"Don't see what they can do, what anybody can do about it. But I got a feelin', a feelin' that somethin's doin'. Somethin's wrong. I don't see what—'less Tel Brown or somebody gets a-holda that note."

"Where d'you keep it?" asked Texas Jack.

"Upstairs, locked up in my safe."

The gunman spat noisily.

"In that sardine can? Hell, I could crack that thing with my hands, like a walnut. 'F I was you, Coleman, I'd sleep with that paper under my head, and tomorrow take it over to the bank at Sunbake."

"Today, you mean. I'm foreclosin' on the Crowfoot 's afternoon. I'll kick ole Shetlow out, put a new gang there with you as range boss, and make a real outfit out of it, with a runnin' iron and a good long rope."

"Rustlin'," said Texas Jack, "don't partic'lar appeal to me, but if you give me a good gang to back me up— 'S 'at paper upstairs the on'y legal doc'ment you got to prove your claim?"

" 'S all."

"Well, 'f I was you, I'd keep it in my hand till you get the sher'ff out there and are legal owner. Your pocket's safer'n that tin can safe."

"Maybe you're right, Jack. Reckon I better get that note right now."

A CHAIR scraped. Bucky straightened with a curse at his own stupidity in wasting so much time. But Coleman, though he had arisen, was still in the room below, talking by the table, and if they worked fast—

They sprang to the safe. While Dave

Hamstetter held a match, Bucky hauled a small armful of dusty papers out upon the floor and began to paw through them. What did a note look like? He could not remember ever having seen such a thing. Some kind of legal document, he knew that much. Maybe it would have a seal or something on it. No, he supposed not.

But—anything with Coleman's name on it—no, Pop Shetlow's! He pawed wildly, glancing at one paper after another, casting them all aside, while Dave lighted one match from another to give him light.

Then came the *clump-clump-clump* of feet upon the stairs.

"Hurry!" breathed Dave.

"Gosh, ain't I! Where the heck?"

"Take 'em all! Grab the whole bunch!"

Bucky did. He swooped up handfuls of papers and jammed them madly inside the waistband of his trousers. The papers could be gone over at leisure once they were out of Coleman's house. He cursed himself for not having thought of that sooner.

The heavy footfalls now were in the hall.

With Dave at his heels Bucky ran, or rather, waddled, so encumbered was he with the papers within his waistband. They reached the nearest window, which was open, and which was almost directly over the downstairs back room window through which Hole Card Moore had fired at Tel Brown.

Bucky had both guns tied down and the thongs prevented the papers falling any lower than his thighs, but the bunched plunder made his pants so tight that he was barely able to get one leg over the window sill. He was straining and Dave was pushing when *r-r-r-rrr!* went a seam; then another—*r-r-r-rrrp!* And at the same instant they heard the door swing open.

One footfall as Coleman stepped into the pitch dark room, then silence, sudden and tense. The saloonkeeper, himself only a bulky shadow by the door, could see them plainly in the window. And should he fire, he could not miss.

Dave had been pushing to force Bucky bodily through the window, from which it was an easy drop to the street; the pressure of the husky blacksmith's body suddenly ceased, and there sounded a rush, the sound of heavy bodies colliding and a thump and scuffle, and they went struggling to the floor.

A gun roared, and in the momentary flash Bucky saw Dave and Coleman rolling in the doorway, with the blacksmith on top. The saloon man's gun wrist was jammed tightly beneath Dave's heel against the open door.

Bucky hesitated. That after which they had come, the note, was among those papers in his pants, he believed; all he needed to do was to drop to the street and make off, while Dave overpowered Coleman and followed through the window.

But suppose Dave could not get away; suppose Coleman, a powerful man and a cunning fighter hand to hand, managed to hold the blacksmith till help arrived from below? In that event, Bucky could surmise what would happen to his friend. And in this instance Coleman, though actually wrong, was legally right; he had the law with him.

These thoughts tumbled through his head, and he rolled back into the room. There came the ripping of cloth, and his belt parted with a snap; then he was floundering about on the floor in a whirl of papers and a tangle of torn clothing.

A HEAVY body struck the floor with a jar that shook the house; the door slammed and Bucky heard the puffing of a man. Then through the darkness came a growl of triumph and Dave Hamstetter's voice:

"Chucked him out into the hall! He's a salty jigger! Shore hammered my ribs plenty! Bolt on this door some place—here it is! Whatcha say, Bucky?"

Bucky heaved himself erect and clawed at his pants. Shouts came to him, and the pound of heavy feet below and on the stairs. Coleman was roaring like an angry bull:

"Watch that winder! Jack! Out in the street! You too, Murdick! Blow 'em to hell if they come through that winder! Carmody—Flock! Stay here in the hall and watch the door! And don't be afraid to shoot—shoot to kill!"

Dave leaped to the window and put out his head. A gun barked and a bullet pinged past his face. Texas Jack and Murdick already had gained the side street and had the window covered. Carmody and Flock, the two tough men who, an hour or so before, had passed through the back room on their way to bed, were in the dark hall watching the office door. And save through the window and the door there was no way out!

"Whatcha say, Bucky? Whadda we do now?"

Bucky stumbled to the window and recklessly looked out. Orange flame spat at him from the corner of the house and across the street, and he was jolted back. A moment later hot pain shot through his left arm and he felt warm moisture. With his other hand he fired twice, but almost at random and knew that he missed, for Texas Jack and Murdick had fired from shelter. As he swung back a bullet sang through the door and another crashed up from below, through the pine flooring. Then from below came a fusillade that filled the room with flying lead and splinters.

"Hey!" bellowed Dave. "Hey, Bucky! You're the leader of this expedition. Lead, durn you, lead!"

"My pants—"

"To hell with your pants! Angels don't wear 'em anyhow! Oomph! Son of a gun burned me then! Slug crawled right up my leg!"

Wham! Wham! Wham!

Dave pointed his gun down and fired three shots at random. Bucky followed suit and emptied his gun, squirting lead as if from a hose. Then, his wounded arm thrust inside his half buttoned vest, he held his gun between his knees and reloaded it from his cartridge belt.

The guns below thudded upward without pause. Coleman, Hole Card Moore and Gimpy Carr were shelling the office methodically, leaving no space untouched.

"Oomph!" from Dave again. "I'll be takin' a ride on one of 'em things! Leg again that time!"

A bullet burnt Bucky's cheek, and he fired twice at the door. A cry from the hall and the thud of a falling body, and he knew there was one man less. Lead sang in through the window. Lead pinged off the safe, clipped the ceiling, crashed up through the floor, splintered the door. A shard of glass gashed Bucky's head and a sliver of wood ripped through the soft flesh of his thigh. Any moment might be the last. No man could live long in that death filled room.

Again he had his hot gun between his knees and was reloading. A dull knife seemed probing in his left arm and shoulder. His left elbow dripped blood and his right shoe was squashy with wet warmth. Acrid smoke fumes bit into his lungs and every breath was agony.

He fumbled cartridges, and dropped more than he got in the chambers of his Colt. The roar of Dave's guns came as if from a long way off.

Vaguely he knew that the shots outside had multiplied. Hazily he guessed that Texas Jack and Murdick had been joined by others of the gang. He heard something clatter against the side of the house by the window and staggered toward it, thinking the room was being stormed from the street.

He collided with the sill and fell across it. Then he felt strong hands clutch him and he knew no more.

HE FLOATED up out of a dark, dark pit into a room flooded with bright sunshine. He was in bed. At his right stood a round bodied, apple cheeked little man who grinned at him. A thousand pains attacked his body in unison and his left arm and right leg were stiff with bandage.

"Lay still, boy," said the little man. "You caused me enough trouble a'ready, 'thout squirmin' all the bandage off. You're a'right; busted up some, but

nothin' serious. I don't think you'll die."

"H'lo, Doc Brant. Where the heck am I, Doc, and all about it. And—uh—ouch!"

"Told you not to move. You're in ole Sam Burnett's bedroom, just off the store."

"How come?"

"Closest place, and Tel Brown brung you here."

"Tel Brown?" Bucky gasped.

Then there crowded back upon him the events of the night before, up to the moment when he had pitched headlong across the window sill of Coleman's office.

"Who got me out of that room, Doc?"

"Tel Brown. He put a ladder aginst the winder and dragged you out. Texas Jack was dead, you see—"

"Dead—Texas Jack? Who killed him?"

"Tel Brown. Hole Card Moore has departed this earth too, and so has—"

"Who killed Moore?"

"Tel Brown."

Bucky gulped and stared.

"Tel Brown," he said faintly, "kinda hadda hand in things. What else'd he do?"

"Well, I dunno. I s'spect—but I dunno. Flood is dead and so is Sam Murdick, and Coleman and Gimpy Carr is plenty shot up."

"Who cut down Sam Murdick—Tel Brown, huh?"

"No, Frank Shetlow, and he also cracked down on Coleman and knocked his legs from under him."

"Frank Shetlow? Frank Shetlow? Doc, what'sa matter with you?"

"Frank Shetlow, I said. When Tel Brown went up the ladder to get you and Hamstetter, after him and Frank'd finished Texas Jack and Murdick, Frank stood in the street and kept the gang in the house. He's a durn' good man, Frank Shetlow—salty, I says, and if you want a certified statement—"

"Doc, don't say nothin' more for a while. I'm delirious or somethin', looks like. Say, I gotta get up! Where's my pants?"

"Boy, you ain't got no pants. When Tel Brown brung you down you was durn' near naked."

He remembered now. He had kicked the remnants of his pants off in Coleman's office. And he had lost the papers!

"Doc," he groaned, "I got clever last night. And all I done was get shot up and make a durn' fool outa myself. I gotta get up! I gotta see Coleman, durn him—and Frank Shetlow and—and Tel Brown!"

"Try to get up and I'll down you with a table leg. I didn't do all that expert bandagin' for nothin'. And if you must see Tel Brown, all you gotta do is turn your head forty-five degrees to the left."

BUCKY twisted his head and found himself looking out of a window that opened upon the store porch, and not five feet away, in his old splint bottom chair, his long legs outstretched to the railing and his jaws champing upon a wad of wood, sat Tel Brown.

"Boy," drawled the big idler, "I been sittin' here all mornin' waitin' for you to come to, and I don't like it. Makes me feel like a loafer. How you are?"

Bucky was about to loose a torrent of questions when from across the street came Dave Hamstetter, with one bandaged foot in an upperless shoe and a sunburst of plaster upon his cheek. He saw Bucky, roared greeting and hobbled up the steps to the porch.

"Hey!" he bawled. "Whadda you know—Coleman's gone and left in a buckboard early this mornin'! He left ev'rything!"

"'S kinda hard to take a house like that along with you in a buckboard," remarked Tel Brown, reaching for another splinter. "And them papers was kinda incrim'natin', one way and another, so he was in what you would call a hurry kinda."

"Papers?" said Bucky. "What papers, Tel?"

"Well, I thought I might as well do a good job long's I was doin' it, so I collected them papers tying Coleman up with a lotta rustlin' jobs and one thing

another, and I give the note to Frank Shetlow to take out to his pop—"

"The note!" gasped Bucky.

Then it came to him. The ladder against the side of the house, Frank Shetlow's pretending to be drunk, sitting right by the window by the ladder, so he could watch the gang in the bar and signal Tel Brown should any one start upstairs. And the open safe—

"A'most f'got," said Tel Brown. "Dave, I borrowed a drill and a bit from your shop last night. It's under Coleman's porch. Good drill. Cut into that safe like cheese."

"And Frank Shetlow—" muttered Bucky.

"Yeh, durn' good man, even 'f he ain't got no chin. Chins don't make no difference. Can't allus tell what's inside a man by lookin' and listen' at him. Frank, now, talks like he's lyin' all the time, and when he says a thing, no matter how true it is, it sounds like a lie. The's men like that. Many a tough lookin', ugly lookin' gent's got a heart like a mouse, and many a weak lookin', soft speakin' gent's a curly wolf inside, and many a man you'd swear was a born liar, murderer, hoss-thief and sheepherder is—"

"Like Frank Shetlow!" exclaimed Dave. "Bucky, ain't we dumb?"

Tel Brown slumped lower in his chair. His eyelids drooped.

"I gotta get my rest," he drawled. "I'm t—lazy, and 'f I don't get my rest durin' the day I ain't worth a durn. Can't sleep at night. Be quiet now while the village loafer loafs."

For a half minute there was silence, then Dave Hamstetter hobbled forward.

"Hey, Tel, 'bout them graves—them three graves! What was in 'em?"

"Huh? Graves? Three graves? Oh, yeh!" Tel Brown squinted at the sky. "Well, you see, just then the letter carrier drives up, and he had a letter for this fella Jones from his wife, sayin' she got there a'right, and the uncle was married to a woman name o' Brown or Smith or somethin', and the children was a'right on'y one of 'em had a little cold—Jennie, I think it was, or maybe Alice or Bobby—no—"

"But them graves, durn it! Then—then the' wasn't—wasn't—"

"Wasn't nothin' in 'em," drawled Tel Brown, "nothin' but dirt, that is, and there them fellas was diggin' and diggin', and they couldn't say Jones hadn't told 'em."

He yawned, closed his eyes and slept, while his jaws champed on.

WHALES

By

LEONARD H. NASON

THE WHALING industry has in its time made many men rich, and in its decline made many poor.

Among others, it ruined two cities; New Bedford in the United States, and Biarritz in France. Biarritz is a name that one always couples with luxury, with dark eyed Spaniards, gambling, and the Empress Eugénie. Yet once upon a time Biarritz was the largest whaling port in the world.

A natural breakwater, now destroyed, made a perfect harbor, and in the shelter of this harbor the small boats lay, and sallied forth to fight the whales which were found at that time in the Bay of Biscay. There was a try-works on shore, and the débris of the boneyard of this factory is brought up every time there is any excavating done in the locality.

On the hill above the harbor stood a tower. The ruins of this tower are still plainly seen, and many are the legends current about it. It was a pirates' watch tower; it is the only relic of an ancient castle of some feudal lord; it is an ancient prison where some beautiful woman was shut up to prevent her marrying the man of her choice. Alas, what bunk! This tower was built by the whale fishers, and they watched for whales from its summit. When one was sighted, the Basque fishers sallied forth in small boats and killed it.

Toward the close of the fourteenth century the whales began to disappear, and the Basques built larger boats and went in search of them. There are records in existence today of the discovery of Iceland by the Basques in 1412, and the fact that there was a great continent across the sea was common knowledge in the Basque country before Columbus was born.

Does it seem reasonable that in his age, in a time of darkest superstition and ignorance, Columbus could find enough men to man three ships to explore the boundless ocean, and that these ships would hold their course for months without a mutiny? The explanation probably was that the sailors knew there was a continent across the ocean, undoubtedly there were Basques among them who had been there, and the reason they finally mutinied was because Columbus took longer on the voyage than the Basques were accustomed to take.

The country of Newfoundland is full of Basque names, notably Bacaillao, which means cod in Basque, and Urrugnousse, named after Urrugne near St. Jean de Luz. The whale took the Basques to Newfoundland, but the industry came to an end for the Basques long before it did for the Americans. This was not due to the discovery of petroleum, but to the disastrous wars of Louis the Fourteenth, and to the gradual filling up of the harbors along the Basque coast by the sand brought down by the rivers from the interior, so that the sailing ships had anchorage there no longer.

Slim Evans and Duke Daly solve an ominous mystery of the Big Tops

CIRCUS DAZE

By THOMSON BURTIS

CHAPTER I

SLIM EVANS HAS HIS UPS AND DOWNS

I HAVE never been an addict of thinking—that is, not to excess. In general it is a troublesome activity, giving rise to doubts and speculations, annoying to a man of sedentary habits who has a dislike for and disbelief in worry. Particularly is it liable to be ruinous to a flyer, which, in a manner of speaking, I am. The more nearly cuckoo a pilot is the better fitted he is for his profession. In fact, the mere statement that a man is an airman presupposes the fact that he has no brains.

However, occasionally I am unsuccessful in keeping my massive mentality in its customary quiescent state. And whenever I get to mulling over those dizzy days down on the Border at McMullen, Texas, I find myself, despite my best efforts, becoming thoughtful. Mostly about the elongated limb of coincidence. Had Duke Daly, the Barr-Maxwell circus, a benefit for the McMullen hospital and a train robbery not converged at one and the same time the State of Texas would have missed one of its balmiest days. Likewise, the history of the Border Patrol which the Air Service ran along the Rio Grande would have been shy one of its most pregnant chapters—a chapter which the patrolmen will be thumbing over when they reach the age where their principal problem is whether to sleep with their whiskers inside or outside of the blankets.

This coincidence business gives me a laugh, anyway. If you hit the town of Podunk for the first time in your life, broke, and, walking down the street, see coming toward you an old friend whom you haven't seen for ten years, and he has ten dollars, you'd call that a coincidence. Howthesoever, if you stop to think, you'll realize that the way you originally became acquainted with that friend was also a coincidence. It involved a million or more decisions on the part of yourself, himself and your respective forbears, *ad infinitum*, to make possible the fact that you and he were in the same place, out of all the world, that time you met. On that basis of figuring, everything that happens in life partakes more or less of said coincidental qualities.

The moral is that if what happened hadn't have happened, due to the ingredients of dynamite gathering in McMullen at the same time, something else would have happened eventually—and everything was even. It just made a more entertaining series of events—to me, at least.

I happened to be somewhat implicated in the matter, contrary to my usual habit. I strive earnestly to be on the sidelines. I like to watch, but I hate to mix in.

A Complete Novel of the Border Air Patrol

Now that I'm growing old, slightly above thirty, I find that my principal athletic accomplishment is blowing smoke rings, and my ambition in life is to avoid work. That being the case, I doubtless would have turned tail and run that sunny September day, had I had a chance.

I'D BEEN sent from the town of McMullen—the most easterly station of the Border Patrol—to Donovan Field, which is near San Antonio, in a wornout DeHaviland bomber. It had wheezed and whistled and popped its way the two hundred miles which intervened between the two points, and at Donovan I had thankfully consigned it to the repair shops. I was presented with a brand new ship to fly back as a replacement for the old one.

All of which accounts for the fact that at the witching hour of 2 P.M. I was peacefully oozing through the ozone, fifty miles north of McMullen, at one hundred and twenty miles an hour. A spanking breeze was on my tail, the twelve cylinder

Liberty was turning up fifteen hundred, throttled, without a miss, and there was absolutely nothing on my mind. Instead of taking the direct airline across a hundred and fifty miles of mesquite, I was flying the longer route, following the railroad.

There were some landing fields and clearings along the railroad. I never believe in taking unnecessary chances unless there's a good reason for it. Had I needed a drink badly, or been out of cigarets, I'd have flown airline and gambled my comfort against the failure of the motor. As it was, I had no reason for haste except the desire to take a nap.

I peered ahead down the railroad, at intervals, in a casual manner. When I spotted the three car train which ran daily—taking nearly twenty-four hours each way—from San Antone to McMullen I thought I might drop down and wave hello to old Pete Young, the engineer, as well as Hank Jaffray, the conductor. The flight had been at McMullen for nearly four years, and we knew every chick, child and pig in the town. They were sort of proud of the flight, I guess. We'd landed our share of rustlers, smugglers and other gents prone to operate without the law.

The patrol, I may state, consisted of a dozen flights between the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California, which daily patrolled that troublesome Border and were alert, at all times, to answer a call for help and see what machine guns from the air could do. You can readily realize how aerial rangers, as it were, riding airplanes capable of a hundred and twenty miles an hour, could become somewhat of a threat to the sinful.

Far ahead I saw a dot against the two shining lines of track. That would be the train. The right of way was just a cut through limitless mesquite which reached the skyline on all sides. At intervals of a few miles there was a tiny station, serving some ranch, but there wasn't a real town along its entire length save for the fifty miles just outside of the two termini.

I didn't note, at the time, that the train was motionless. In fact, when it was running full speed you had to look twice to see whether it was standing still or not. It consisted of a combination freight, express and mail car, a day coach, and the first Pullman ever built by that noted company. If not the first, it had lived the toughest life, anyhow. The road was just a branch line, and its speed schedule allowed the engineer to enjoy a full conversation while passing a cowpuncher sitting on a fence.

WHILE overtaking this roaring behemoth of the rails, I might as well tell you that my name is Slim Evans, my rank a first lieutenant in the Army Air Service, and that I'd served on the Border Patrol, off and on, since its inception. It was composed of the hardest boiled veterans of the Service, and it was sprinkled thicker with aces than a Mexican *chili con carne* is with pepper. I'm not an ace; I did get credit for a Boche in Germany, which I didn't knock down, but I knocked down one I didn't get credit for, so I accepted the *Croix de Guerre* with pineapple and didn't feel too guilty. I'm six feet five, with barely enough skin and flesh to cover my skeleton, which seems about to break through in dozens of places. I stumble through life as easily as possible, and when confronted with an emergency have heretofore managed to get out of it on top by the same method which a rhinocerous would take to get out of a paper corral. I hit what's nearest, try to save myself, and emerge usually somewhat the worse for wear, but still among you.

I was not more than seven or eight miles from the train, and close to four thousand feet high, when I took another look over the side. There could be no doubt of the fact that the train was not moving.

An instant later my neck, similar to an ostrich's, was craned way over the side. As I held my goggles to keep them from blowing around in the propeller blast, I was straining my eyes at nothing else but an airplane. It was on the ground, in a

pretty good field next to the railroad track, and the train had stopped alongside of it.

Naturally, I started down. I cut the motor to seven hundred revolutions and went into as steep a dive as a DeHaviland is supposed to stand, which isn't very steep. I kept my eyes on the train, and as I got over it, twenty-five hundred feet high, and started to spiral, I noted a few things which made my heart leap a bit.

Not a soul was out of the train, for one thing. For another, there were a half dozen horses tethered in the mesquite. In the third place, one man had rushed from the express car, taken a look, and dived back in like a rabbit.

"Ship must have had a forced landing and flagged the train," I was thinking. I was increasing the speed of the dive every second, unconsciously. "But why those horses? And why isn't anybody out of the cars?"

I was roaring downward at two hundred miles an hour, and the ground was rushing up at me as if it would smack me in the face in another minute. I was perhaps a thousand feet high, as eight men, or about that many, erupted from various cars as if they'd been shot from a catapult. Six of them ran toward the horses, turning at intervals and firing in the air toward the cars.

Two others had leaped for the airplane—and the airplane's motor was running.

"A train robbery!" I shouted to myself, unheard above the whine of the tortured wires and the roaring of the motor. "Didn't I drop in at the right time!"

The horsemen could wait. I was making for the plane. I was less than five hundred feet high when the men threw a sack into the cockpit and vaulted in themselves.

"A new wrinkle, taking the swag away to Mexico by plane!" I was telling myself.

I was five hundred feet north of the field as I hunched down behind the windshield and went into a nose dive which had the ton and a half bomber shaking as if it would burst into a thousand pieces. My hand found the machine gun controls, and I fired a burst to make sure my guns were working. Still no life from the cars as the plane got under way for the takeoff.

I was two hundred feet back of them, and a hundred feet high as they started. I had forgotten safety and the limitations of a frail DH. I was coming like the wind in a hurry. I didn't want to shoot them in cold blood if I could help it.

But I knew something else I could do. In one last swoop I got he DH within three feet of the ground. I was going like a cannon ball, straight for the fleeing plane. It was scudding down the field, and seemed about to take off any second.

I bore down on it like a three thousand pound thunderbolt. I was going two hundred and twenty miles an hour if I was moving at all. Now I had my head out the side, to see better, and the force of the air stream just about suffocated me.

Ten feet back of the outlaw plane I eased back on the stick, ever so little. It was a matter of inches whether I ruined my prop or not, but I made it. My undercarriage crashed against the trailing edge of their upper left hand wing just as they were taking the air.

JUST what happened, I don't know. I guess I hit them too solidly. The shock shook the DeHaviland as if it had hit a stone wall. In an instant the struts were dancing and the wires vibrating until they were wide blurs. Perhaps I'd nicked my prop, too—the motor seemed to be shaking itself loose from its base, and the roar of it became ugly and uneven.

I was zooming upward, and I looked back while my hand tightened on my trembling control stick. The ship below had been flipped over on its back and was hidden in a cloud of dust. People were pouring from the cars, now, and streaming toward the wreck.

For an instant I hesitated. I knew that almost inevitably that shock, plus the terrific vibration, meant that my landing

gear was at least a partial wreck and that a landing meant a crackup. Over on the other side of the train, almost a half mile from me, six riders were galloping like mad through the mesquite. I could round them up, but would the ship last? Such quivering meant that the fuselage had been weakened, and doubtless that the propeller was out of balance.

"I've got to crack up anyway; might as well risk it," I told myself as I banked toward the riders.

I throttled the motor to reduce the vibration as much as possible. As I shot toward the fugitives I happened to look upward for a second. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Two thousand feet above me, diving downward at an ungodly rate, was another airplane. It was small and chunky and seemed to be gaudily painted, although I couldn't get the colors clearly. It wasn't an Army ship, that was certain.

"Seems to be an aerial convention out here in the desert," I told myself.

For a second I was badly scared. Events had eventuated with such fluency that I was in a sort of daze. For a second I thought that the strange ship must be an ally of the ground bandits. Then I came to myself, and realized how foolish that thought was.

Nevertheless, it seemed uncanny for that plane to be there at the moment. I felt like passengers on ocean liners must feel these days, as if they'd get an airplane tangled in their hair any second.

Then I forgot that other ship as the vibration of my own had me jumping in my seat. The horsemen were directly below me.

"The mesquite's the best place to come down if I'm minus an undercarriage, anyway!" I told myself, whistling to keep up my courage, and dived.

I fired a hail of bullets from the machine guns on the cowling fifty feet or so ahead of the fleeing riders, as a gentle warning. And it worked.

They knew the Border, and the capabilities of the patrol's guns, evidently. Their last hope gone, knowing that I could wipe them out with one shower of bullets, they hauled their horses up short. In an instant I was around in a bank. I swooped down close to them, motioning back toward the train.

They started like a flock of sheep, their horses trotting along dejectedly. They didn't even try an abortive shot at me. They were licked.

At any second I expected the propeller to dash itself into pieces, or some part of the ship to fall off. There wasn't a wire or strut or spar that wasn't trembling. But I had to ride herd on my captives until a dozen or so men who were on their way from the train could take charge of them. So I circled, watching instrument needles on the dashboard which were leaping from one side of each gage to the other.

Suddenly the drone of the other motor undertoned mine. I was about three hundred feet high, and that strange ship swooped past me, not fifty feet away from my right wing tip.

The tall passenger in the front seat was gesturing frantically. He was pointing to my undercarriage. I nodded. The last doubt in my mind as to what lay ahead of me was dissipated.

I didn't feel so good, but I was conscious of a vague feeling of surprise at what I read on the side of the ship.

"Barr-Maxwell Circus" was painted down the side of the fuselage, and from what I could see the same inscription was on both the upper and lower wings. The rudder was yellow, the elevators blue, and the letters yellow on a blue background. The motor cowling was red. It sure was a flying crazy quilt.

"Sure! I've seen billboards of that show's coming to McMullen, at that," I told myself. "Must have a ship for advertising and publicity. I guess . . ."

IT HAD banked, and suddenly it was passing me again. My eyes froze to that passenger in the front seat. He was standing up, and in his hands he was holding what was surely a parachute pack. He was pointing to me, and then pointing

upward, as if trying to make me understand something.

"What the hell?" I asked myself dazedly, and got no answer. "What good does a chute in his ship do me?"

Again he came by, and again pointed skyward. He wanted me to get higher. I nodded, but I had no more idea what was in his mind than I had of the thoughts of the king of Siam.

I had to spend a moment more with my captives. When I saw them safely in the hands of the passengers, a quarter of a mile from the train, my predicament commenced to assume real proportions. Something had to be done right away. The people on the ground were also making motions, and one of them had taken a wheel from the wrecked ship and was throwing it into the air.

"This tub'll never hold together long enough for me to get to water to land in," I was thinking. "The mesquite, I guess—I wish I had a parachute."

Again that drone, and again that gaudy ship swooped past, the passenger gesticulating wildly and holding up that parachute.

I couldn't imagine anything in the world that could be done for me. And yet he must have some crazy idea in his head. And it might work. But what was I to decide? If I went higher, and the ship went to pieces, I'd be killed inevitably. On the other hand, I was close to the ground, and could get down and crack up, probably, before the ship went out of control.

I guess it was the thought of the almost inevitable fire which decided me. I'd take a chance.

And so I sent my reeling, staggering ship into a climb. The noise was terrific. The motor seemed to be clanging as well as roaring; the wires were screaming shrilly, and it sounded as though pieces of wood were knocking against each other. My feet couldn't hold the floor, they were drumming a tattoo against the rudder bar. Down below every living soul was lined up by the train, their heads tipped backward as they watched.

The other ship was twelve hundred feet high as I reached a thousand. My fascinated eyes then beheld an amazing sight. That passenger, a chute on his back, was climbing out of the cockpit and inching himself along a wing. He apparently had something else slung around him, too, like wire or rope.

Now that ship was circling. I watched him as he swung easily down to the undercarriage.

"He must be one of the circus acrobats," I remember thinking, "or else a professional daredevil, but what good does that do me?"

He sat on the spreader bar of the undercarriage, finally leaning against the airstream as he appeared to be busying himself with his shoelaces, or something. I was close now, and my eyes were popping against my goggles as I tried to make out what he was up to. I saw him remove the parachute, and he seemed to be tying something to it.

It was safety wire! I got his idea. But there was only a few feet of it, not more than three, and of all the desperate chances I ever saw that would be the worst. I couldn't ease up close enough to grab the chute without the chances being strongly in favor of a collision which would bring both ships down.

Right there he did his stuff, and I let out a yip of pure, unadulterated horror. As though he'd been blown off his perch, his body went backward, and the next second he was hanging by his ankles from the undercarriage.

Then I saw what he had done. His ankles were tied, so he could not fall. There he hung, fifteen hundred feet above the earth, his body swaying backward. In his hand he held the end of a three-foot wire, to which was attached the parachute pack, blown backward by the propeller blast.

I settled down for the flying, which meant unquestionably the difference between possible safety and sure maiming. My ship wouldn't last another five minutes. The motor was cutting out now, as the carburetor float went wrong, due to

the vibration. They were flying straight, level and slow.

I got behind them and under them. I gave my ship full gun, and went past them, twenty feet below that dangling figure. I couldn't ease up to them from behind. A foot's miscalculation and my propeller would catch him.

When I was fifty feet ahead of them I throttled slightly, and went into ever so slight a climb. They were dropping downward, slowly. My head was turned, my eyes focused on that parachute pack.

A second later, and my belt was unfastened. Flying automatically, I thought that pack was the center of the universe. Now their propeller was whirring over my head. An instant later, and the pack was bouncing above me.

I let go the stick, stood up, and made a wild grab. I got it!

As I sunk back in my seat and grabbed the stick I was still looking upward, gazing, for the first of many times, into the eyes of the man I was to come to know as Buck Rariden.

IT WAS just a fleeting glance; his pilot whisked the ship upward as I sent mine into a dive, to prevent my propeller's tangling with the man who'd saved me. I saw a long, bony face, with a grin on it, and bold eyes that stared into mine with hard enjoyment of the situation. And all the while his jaws were working rhythmically on the cud of tobacco in his right cheek.

I worked frantically to get the chute on. A quick glance assured me that it was a U. S. Irving type, already tested by the Army but not yet regular equipment for flyers. The seat pack chute had not been developed at that time.

I didn't know whether it was folded properly or not, of course.

"It's a pull off for me," I decided, "and I've got to work fast."

Heading for that open field next to the train, I inched myself out on the fuselage, one hand on the stick. The ship almost shook me off. I was like an ant riding well shaken jelly. Finally I was flat on my stomach, one hand on the stick and the other on the ripcord, hanging on by my feet and knees.

As I got over the field I pulled the ripcord. I was at the side of the field farthest from the train, so that there'd be no danger of its falling on any one.

I felt the pilot chute snap out, and the next second I hit the tail controls heavily as I was whisked from my perch. Then I was swinging in the air over the mesquite, my body even with the chute at the end of each arc. I was safe.

A moment later the DeHaviland crashed in a ball of fire, and I was grasping the shroudlines, slipping the big silk umbrella sideward to get over the field. As I floated downward the circus ship sped past me, the hand of the passenger raised in jovial salute as it winged its way southward. And if you don't think Slim Evans waved back with sincerity and enthusiasm, you'd expect me to acknowledge a thousand dollar gift with a kick in the pants.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE FACE OF DUKE DALY

THE PEOPLE on the ground were cheering as I descended. I guess some of them were about as relieved as I was. One man was running toward the spot where I would light, according to my drift.

"There's a guy with some sense," I said approvingly, as I seemed to be dropping with ever increasing speed. "In this breeze the chute'll be hard to handle."

When one gets close to the ground in a chute, the speed of the drop seems to increase by leaps and bounds until fifteen feet a second feels like the speed of a scout. I got hold of the shroudlines, and a second later I hit as I tried to pull myself upward to ease the shock.

My knees bent like jackknives, and with my customary grace I sprawled all over the ground. The next second the wind caught the billowing silk, and I was being bumped along the ground as my curses resounded from the welkin. I

tried to unstrap the harness, but my fumbling fingers couldn't find the release. Then I caught up with my chute. It folded around me, swathing me hand and foot, with enough surface exposed to the freshening Gulf breeze to send us both rolling and thumping along the ground. I threshed wildly, and it was a wonder my language didn't set it afire.

Just as I was working loose, breathless, red faced, I heard quiet chuckles from without. Hands ripped the white silk away, and suddenly I was out in the sunshine again. I had bruises all over my body, dirt in my mouth, and sand in my eyes.

"Hello, Slim," came a quiet voice, and I was staring up into a pair of familiar gray eyes.

I thought I was having a dream. I took three looks at the oncoming stream of people and decided that I wasn't totally cuckoo, after all.

"Duke Daly!" I gasped, and put up one arm weakly.

He shook hands briefly and said with a chuckle, which was unusual.

"I've been homesick for the Border for a long time. Now I know why!"

He helped me to my feet and, as the vanguard of the spectators arrived, a film seemed to draw over those gray eyes. He was as aloof and impersonal as if he had been a well tailored image. That was the Duke Daly I had known. Never, until that moment when he was leaning over me, had I seen warm humaneness in his eyes, except sometimes when he was with the man who was apparently his only friend, Tex MacDowell.

There was a lot of excited, inarticulate comments, questions and exclamations from the crowd regarding the events of the past few minutes, and finally, on the way back to the train, I had a chance to inject a few of my own.

"It was a train robbery, of course?" I asked the Duke, and he nodded.

"It seems that the McMullen bank was getting a shipment of several hundred thousand dollars from San Antone," he told me evenly. "This gang stopped the train by means of flagging it after landing the plane. Then they just took charge, got into the express car, wounded the two men inside, and were about to escape when you dropped in."

"Hurt anybody in the crash?" I inquired.

"Slightly, but they're all in custody, of course—guarded by their own guns."

"Pretty carefully laid plot," I remarked. "Flossy of 'em, using a plane to make sure of the swag, eh?"

"It's pretty certain that well known Mexican oil field hijackers are the leaders," Daly informed me. It seemed that he was talking casually to an idle acquaintance. "If so, it's a fair haul. The flyer is a German, and the ship from Mexico. It would have been close to a three hundred thousand dollar job, if it had worked. The men were masked and, by scattering, probably could have escaped. Two Mexicans in it."

I took a look at them, tied securely in the express car, but recognized none of them.

"I SURE hope I see that gazabo that saved my bacon," I commented to Daly. "He must be bound for McMullen, and in that case he'll land at the field. It's an advance ship for a circus, and he must be an acrobat hired for publicity exhibitions."

"Whatever he is, he's got a head on him."

"And guts," I added. "He knew, of course, that his head would be within a foot of a prop. What a bump might have done to him is nobody's business."

Which was no more than the exact truth.

"And now tell me," I asked as we climbed into the Pullman car. "How did you get down here—and why?"

"Just a visit," he said casually, which didn't necessarily mean that what he said was the truth at all.

We settled into a seat and for a few minutes fought off excited people who wanted to talk. I knew most of them—McMullenites—and escaped on the plea

that I was tired. That being over, I took a good look at the self-contained Daly.

It had been two years since I'd seen him. For a few weeks he had been one of the McMullen flight, and then, in a night fight with some smuggling airplanes, he'd done as pretty and reckless a piece of flying as I'd ever looked at. He saved Tex MacDowell's life, and we got the smugglers; but he'd come out of it with a slight limp which the doctors said would make him physically ineligible for Army flying. He'd left the Army; and disappeared, as far as we were concerned.

Almost a year later, however, a Secret Service man named Graves who'd been our superior in rounding up this smuggling gang had suddenly sent for Tex MacDowell. There was a smuggling job on the Canadian Border that needed planes, and Daly, a civilian, and Tex, an Army man, were appointed special agents under Graves and got their men. Tex had come back—he had been Daly's one friend, as far as I knew—with just brief news that Daly was O. K. and that it was probable that he'd work as a special agent under Graves from then on.

DALY was staring out at the mesquite as the train wheezed and bumped along on the last lap of its trip, and as I watched him I wished for the thousandth time that I was underneath the impenetrable shell which he showed to the world. I suspected that Tex MacDowell knew his inmost secrets, but I was willing to bet that no other living human did, unless it was the elderly Graves.

Take a look at him. I suppose that, generally speaking, he was the most remarkable looking man I've ever seen. And I knew the reason for it.

In the first place, although he was thirty, about six feet tall, and had lived an eventful life, his face was that of a too handsome boy of twenty-two who'd never been farther than the next township and whose most serious problem had been to decide which girl to take to the next dance. His hair was blond; his features were as regular as if cut by a sculptor, almost characterless, no lines whatever in the skin. That face was like a good looking mask—good looking in the magazine cover sense. Nose straight as a die, lips rather thin but perfectly cut, clean lined jaw which was neither strong nor weak, eyebrows as regular as if carefully adjusted by a painter. Its habitual expression was sort of brooding, I think. He smiled rarely, and when he did it was just a slight widening of the mouth.

But here's the catch. His gray eyes were as different from his face as day is from night. See him from the side, and you'd say a vapid college kid, a collar ad boy. Take one look into his eyes, and you knew you were before a man who'd sampled much and seen a lot of what he hadn't sampled. There was experience, and understanding and maturity in them.

It was sort of creepy, looking into the face of a pretty little child and seeing in its eyes the personality of a suffering soul.

The reason for this contradiction was simple. A wreck when he was a flying instructor had mashed his face up badly and forced the doctors to do a job of plastic surgery. They'd ended up by giving him a handsome, clear cut cloak for his personality. Tex MacDowell, who seemed to consider himself in honor bound to reveal nothing whatever concerning Daly, nevertheless always gave me the impression that he considered the Duke one of the world's most unusual characters.

That was the tall chap who was sitting alongside me. Hair smoothly brushed, attired in an immaculate light gray suit and polished shoes, he was the coolest, cleanest, best dressed person on the train.

"The gang'll sure get a surprise when you heave in sight," I told him.

"No, I wired Tex," he replied.

"Sure it's just a visit, Duke?" I inquired.

He turned toward me and smiled slightly.

"Uh-huh. I will say, though, that when I asked for leave Mr. Graves said I might do a little snooping around about

this Von Sternberg gang that you fellows have been following up."

He referred to a group of aerial smugglers under the leadership of a former German ace named Von Sternberg. Said Heinie was at present a captive in a hospital at El Paso. We'd hurt him when we bagged him—but he did not die as expected.

"You people think that the gang will continue to operate without their leader?" I asked him.

"Maybe. Graves thought I might run down into Mexico and find out."

"We've suspected, or Tex has, that Graves was using you often."

"He is. It's quite a bit of fun, too. You needn't let the information out, though. That is, outside of the flight. You fellows and I are in the same business, after all. But there's no need of the outside world knowing it."

"Right you are."

WE CHATTED along quietly. I'll swear, if I hadn't seen that moment, back there after I'd landed, when he was himself, a chuckling human being with warmth in his eyes I'd have figured that he barely remembered me and didn't give a damn whether he talked to me or not. His indifference was not assumed. You wouldn't call it superior, either. It didn't make you sore at him. It sort of wet blanketed you in a mysterious fashion. It didn't mean a thing to me, but some of the flight, I knew, looked at him with bewildered, resentful awe. They couldn't figure him out.

I told him most of the highlights at McMullen before the train breezed into the station. I took a look out the window, and drew a long breath.

"The clans have gathered," I informed the Duke. "Damned if every living thing in McMullen isn't here. I'll bet the stores are closed."

In the lead was the towering figure of old Sheriff Trowbridge, at the head of enough deputies to arrest an army. Word had been wired ahead, and I presume the circus men had told their tale. An angry mob swirled around the station, the square surrounding it, and there was an overflow in adjacent streets.

"There's Tex—and Cap Kennard!" I exclaimed suddenly, and for some reason my eyes shifted to Daly's face as he peered out the window.

Again he changed. Those eyes were soft and warm, and the kind of affection which can only exist between two real men glowed within them. And MacDowell, his more than six feet sticking forth from the mob, was searching the train with a pair of sparkling eyes which didn't register any dread of the ordeal.

As I climbed off I became a flagpole sticking forth from shrubbery, and no one could miss me. A thousand congratulations were tossed at me before the mob scurried to the express car to watch the unloading of the bandit gang.

"Hello, Duke, glad to see you," came MacDowell's Southern drawl, and as the two men's hands met stocky little Captain Kennard, his scarred face one wide grin, said raucously:

"Hi, Daly; welcome to our city. Slim, I understand you left a brand new ship up in the mesquite. Can't you even take a quiet cross country any more?"

"Came near digging a quiet grave for myself," I informed him. "Say, did those circus men land at the airdrome?"

"Sure did!" cackled the little C. O. "And that boy Rariden is probably the damndest Irishman that ever spit twenty feet and hit a nail on the head!"

"Who is he?" asked Daly's voice as we shoved through the crowd.

"He's the manager of the circus that's going to play here in a week—Barr-Maxwell."

"What's the manager doing acting as his own press agent?" I demanded.

Penoch O'Reilly, one of the flyers, had traveled with a circus for a few months when but a budding youth, and through him the flight had soaked in information

by the ton concerning tent shows. We knew almost everything from what the stake and chain wagon was to the technicalities of "zuluing".

"Oh, he's full of special schemes he wants to put over here," Kennard informed us. "He's even considering making McMullen winter quarters for the show. He'll tell you."

"Just what happened, Slim, anyway?"

I happened to glance at the Duke at that moment. His face seemed funny, somehow—older, and his eyes bleaker.

"His name doesn't happen to be Buck Rariden, does it?" he asked suddenly.

"Right you are. Know him?" demanded Kennard.

"Ran into him around the racetrack a little. Eccentric egg," nodded Daly.

And yet, somehow, I thought that for some reason Daly was far from well pleased that Rariden was among us.

"I sure want to meet him," I stated. "He saved my onions—no doubt about that. And the one look I got at him made me want to get more. Well, the yarn is this."

I spun it. When I got to the ground section of the parachute jump Daly, who had sort of become humanized as he talked gaily with Tex, cut in. Again he let himself go, and was quite boyish.

"Let me tell that!" he begged, and tell it he did as we honked down the wide main street of the up and coming city of McMullen.

IT WAS a great town, clean and good looking and not too hot, boasting a really beautiful hotel, good stores, and all modern inconveniences from a Rotary Club to the Woman's Mental Improvement Society. But cowpunchers drifted down the street, and the old West wasn't far away. Being on the Border, excitement was frequent. The mayor was Sam Edwards, ex-Texas Ranger, and the sheriff was Bill Trowbridge, Border pioneer and a lot of the wealthy and solid citizens were old-timers whose wives had stood beside them with rifles in the early cattle days. The town had a certain flavor which one couldn't find anywhere else but in the Southwest.

The Duke had Kennard in stitches, tooling the car all over the road as he laughed at an exaggerated description of my movements and language.

"There's no doubt, though, seriously speaking," Daly concluded evenly, "that Buck Rariden did a good stunt."

"What about him, anyway?" I demanded. "What do you know about him?"

"Nothing. Just know him. Or knew him. He won't remember me. Don't mention what I said."

He started talking to Tex, both of them being in the back seat. MacDowell was a lean, wide shouldered Texan who lounged his way easily through life, his wide set gray eyes constantly on the lookout for excitement. His passion was to get himself into a deep hole, and then work his way out. A contest of any kind was meat and drink to him. He was the best poker player and just about the best flyer on the Border. Occasionally he'd get discontented and broody, and then he'd mope and go on a drunk or do something so reckless and crazy that you'd hold your breath. That was all the result of monotony, which was the one thing he couldn't stand.

Somehow, back in Duke Daly's few days along the Border, he and Tex, out in the mesquite together for hours, had come to an understanding. Just what had happened to draw them so close together I didn't know. But it was there. And the impassive Duke was a different man when he was with his friend. I guess Daly lived a lonely life, at that.

As we drew into the small, sandy airdrome I saw the gang reclining at ease on the porch of the recreation building, one of the several frame structures along the southern edge of the field. On its eastern and western boundaries, corrugated iron hangars flanked the pocket handkerchief landing space, which was now shimmering in the rays of an exceedingly hot sun.

There were two DH's on the line, just

being readied for the last afternoon patrols. Alongside them was that kaleidoscopic circus ship.

"Sure looks natural," commented Daly.

"How long are you going to be with us, Duke?" queried the captain.

"I don't know, a few days, I guess. I may have to go down into Mexico."

He didn't tell them why, and I didn't put forth the information. He would tell them, of course, in time. For some reason I got a hunch right then and there that the Duke would be sheltered in our bosom for some time. I really didn't believe that he'd traveled from Washington to the Border to have a chat with Tex MacDowell.

THE GANG of eight khaki clad flyers greeted us with a loud, raucous cheer as we drew up in a cloud of dust. I searched eagerly for the two strangers.

"They're getting cleaned up a little," Pop Cravath, our fat little adjutant, informed me.

Duke was making the rounds. Jimmy Jennings and Sleepy Spears and Pete Miller and Hickman and Cravath he knew. Dumpy Scarth and Percival Enoch O'Reilly were strangers to him, but he wasn't to them. Funny to watch the younger ones, and those who didn't know him, shake hands. They were almost respectful. He was a sort of legend around the Border, a legend I aimed to fathom. I've got almost as much curiosity as I have bone in my head, which is considerable.

"Are the circus men going to stay out here?" Kennard asked of the mob in general.

"Sure are, thank God!" Sleepy Spears yawned— "That is for Rariden. That pilot of his doesn't give me any appetite."

"Well," I informed them, "I'm going to the tents, and I desire an introducer. The time has come, as it were, to present my respects to my saviors and assure them of my regard and estéem. I—"

"Too bad they happened along," grinned Jack Beaman, an observer who was also supply officer. "If you'd kicked off I could have surveyed the fifteen flying suits I'm shy. I—"

"The minute Jack heard of the wreck he galloped in and made out a survey for fifteen typewriters, eight machine guns, seventy instruments—"

"I'll bet," Kennard broke in, "that Slim's ship had at least a half million dollars' worth of property on it, according to Jack."

"Here he comes," boomed little P. Enoch O'Reilly. "Take a look at the man who holds all spitting records for speed, control and distance."

A tall, rangy figure was walking swiftly toward us. I doubt whether I've ever seen a man or woman walk more gracefully, either. He just seemed to glide over the ground.

"Told us," Jimmy Jennings informed me, "that he'd started in the circus business as an acrobat when he was a kid."

I glanced at the Duke. Daly was not paying a great deal of attention to the oncoming Rariden, and his face was expressionless.

My eyes shifted to the man I'd met high in the air, and as he came closer I felt an irresistible grin creeping over my face.

He was at least six feet two, and of that length about nine-tenths was leg. The distance from his waistline to the ground was a toll call. His shoulders were fairly wide, and his neck long. Above it was a long, thin, bony face, split by a humorously crooked nose. His cheekbones were very high, and the hollows below them could have held one of the Great Lakes apiece. His ears were large, and stuck out from his head like an elephant's. His blue eyes were prominent, below arched, sandy eyebrows. His hair stuck up on his head, a sandy red. And a multitude of freckles was sprinkled over all.

His jaws worked regularly, as if by machinery, and a plug of tobacco made the twenty-second lump in his face.

It was his expression, though, that,

being indescribable, I shall forthwith attempt to describe to you. His wide mouth seemed stretched a bit into the hint of a lopsided grin. His bold blue eyes rested steadily on me, below those arched eyebrows, and there was a humorous sparkle in them; there was a hilarious cast to his whole face. It wasn't gentle humor; it was hard and reckless. It was the grin of a man looking down at his foe and saying—

"How do you like *those* apples?"

And it was irresistible to me. Those working jaws, that challenging, ludicrous look—a choice spirit, squinting with humorous recklessness at the world, was before me. From crooked nose to flapping ears he was of a mold which had been broken when he was made.

He was dressed in unpressed khaki pants, a blue shirt open at the neck and a vest which was unbuttoned. His eyebrows were red and bushy.

"And this would be Slim!" he said as I got up to shake hands. "How's the boy? The chute come in handy, eh?"

"Sure did, Rariden. And thanks."

He crushed my hand in a paw big enough to palm a bowling ball. When he walked, he carried his long arms hanging at his sides, those hams of hands limp at the end of them.

His eyes gleamed quizzically into mine and, without turning his head, he spat out the side of his mouth.

"Don't mention it," he commanded.

As he dropped my hand his eyes were staring over my shoulder. Those eyebrows went higher, until the tips almost met above his nose, and those bulging eyes were staring at Daly.

"ME NAME is Rariden—Buck Rariden," he stated.

He had a sort of expectation, at all times, in his expression, as if he were about to burst into surprised laughter. It was very obvious now.

"This is Bob Daly—used to be a flyer with the flight," Kennard said.

"Haven't I met ye before?" Rariden was saying as he shook hands.

"I don't think so," Daly said smoothly.

Rariden, entirely unembarrassed at the silent scrutiny of the flyers, dropped Daly's hand and shook his head.

"Mebbe I haven't," he admitted, "but the pan is sure familiar, some way."

He dropped down on the step and wiped his freckled brow. Then he expectorated with precision at a passing ant.

"The devil of an afternoon," he stated. "Now I must shoot a wire to Bill Hampton, a lousy press agent, tellin' him to cash heavy on his boss bein' a hero. That's show business. Sure, it was lucky for the both of us, eh Slim?"

"If there's anything I can do to help out publicity for your show," I told him with sincerity, "I'll talk to every reporter in Texas."

"We need it, me lad," grinned Rariden.

His voice was a very deep bass, the result of years of shouting around a circus lot. You notice the same kind of a voice in a lot of men who use their vocal chords a lot in the open air.

Suddenly his eyes, which had flitted to Daly's composed face periodically, seemed to bulge a bit more. His grin became almost a sneer.

"Cut it out, Duke Daly," he rasped. "You know me!"

The Duke's eyes met Rariden's steadily. Suddenly it seemed as if every man was drawn and that electricity was crackling between the two.

"What happened to the pan?" Rariden went on, challenging Daly. "Ye changed, since ye was bettin' commissioner for the Clover Stable."

Again silence, while Daly flicked the ash from his cigaret.

"Airplane crackup—mashed face—doctors gave me a new one," he said quietly. "Sure, I knew you, Buck, but I figured you wouldn't know me—and might feel better if I didn't know you."

"Why?"

Rariden spat the word, and the next second he relieved his mouth of the huge cud of tobacco.

"You know why!"

CHAPTER III

BUCK RARIDEN, SHOWMAN

FOR A full half minute there was a silence which you could cut with a knife. The little knot of flyers were as motionless as so many Southern negroes when the boss is out of sight. Daly, tall and slim and almost icy in his composure, was leaning negligently against the railing. Buck Rariden was standing at the foot of the steps, facing us all like a lean tiger. Sleepy Spears' eyes were open, and very bright, and Tex MacDowell's were blazing pools.

Rariden's skin seemed rubbery; the deep wrinkles around his mouth changed in size and depth all the time, and his lips twisted themselves into a zig-zag sneer.

"Cut out the mystery," he snarled.

There was enmity in the making between the two men. It seemed as if Rariden resented the almost contemptuous composure which was Daly's, and that Daly shrank from the unkempt circus man as if from something unclean. Partly because he had saved my life, of course, and partly for instinctive reasons, I felt myself taking Rariden's part.

"Strikes me you're making a fool of yourself, Buck," Daly told him evenly. "I'm not doing any talking. I didn't recall myself to you, because I thought you might be embarrassed if you knew that one of your old acquaintances was around."

Every word was as clear cut and cold as a diamond. Daly gave the impression that the whole thing was beneath bothering with, as far as he was concerned. He was the superior being, inspecting the vagaries of an ordinary mortal with passionless curiosity.

And Buck Rariden's goat was frisking all over the shimmering airdrome. Not a one of us breathed, I guess, as his lean body tensed and his brows came low over his eyes and his red hair seemed to snap and crack with the power of his wrath.

"Ye've talked too much already. What do I care? I didn't be no saint, at all, in them early days. Where the hell do you git so high an' mighty, Mister Duke Daly? A bettin' commissioner, ye was then—and I don't suppose ye ever played any crooked poker, did ye?"

If I'd breathed before, I stopped breathing then. Daly's face never changed. That film over his eyes was a curtain, dropped to hide any feeling within. Surprises were coming so thick and fast that my brain was stunned. Daly had been a betting commissioner for the biggest racing stable in the country, had he? And now he was being accused of playing crooked poker. So those were some of the things behind that mask of his.

Right then I got a look at Tex MacDowell. That drawling Texan's bronzed face mirrored such suffering that he was like a different man. The devil-may-care flyer had turned into a pleading beggar. It seemed that what Rariden said had hurt him, and not Daly.

Then and there I knew that Rariden had spoken the truth. As Daly spoke, the tension seemed to increase, instead of diminish.

"I was a professional gambler when I was younger, yes," he said precisely. "How did you find that out, Buck? And what does it matter, anyhow?"

He never glanced at the gang of men who were getting the lowdown on him. His eyes held Rariden's, and the contempt in them was increased. He was figuratively drawing his skirts away from the contamination of the showman.

"Not a damn' thing, yer honor; pardon me for bein' so bold as to spake to ye. But what right've ye got to step in an' try to crab me in one o' the biggest deals—"

"Don't be an ass! Your crabbing yourself, if there's any being done!"

Rariden's huge hands were working spasmodically, and the cords in his whip-like forearms were distended. Something in the icy, unutterably superior composure of Daly was driving him mad, and he needed a safety valve. I felt sorry for the Irishman.

"I'LL TELL ye all, and be domned to ye!" he roared suddenly. Then, so abruptly that I felt as if a paper wad thrown at me had turned into a cannon ball and smacked me, he laughed.

And when he laughed, he laughed. His face was a mass of wrinkles, and he chuckled and snorted and gasped.

"My damn' temper—fool that I am! Sure you're right, Daly, but ye got my goat with your not ricognizin' me when ye knew who I was.

"I got t' tell 'em all, now. I hope to God I ain't crabbed in McMullen through my own foolishness."

But when he looked at Daly, his hilarity seemed savage. He was trying to hide his resentment.

Once again though, he was bold and humorous, those eyebrows raised quizzically as he stared challengingly at the world. The flyers relaxed as he placed a new supply of tobacco in his mouth. Almost every pair of eyes stole toward Daly. The Duke was standing in that same negligent posture, but Tex MacDowell was alongside of him, leaning on his shoulder as if to mutely express the fact that he was with him, right or wrong.

"When I met the Duke, here, on the New York tracks ten years ago, I'd just got out o' jail," stated Rariden. "Hell of a note, eh?"

Captain Kennard found his voice. And he barely repressed a chuckle at the Irishman's naïve query.

"Jail is always a hell of a note. What were you in for?"

Now Rariden did one of his kaleidoscopic changes again. He became softer and sort of pleading in an ingenuous way.

"For bein' lot superintendent of a crooked carnival," he told us, his eyes flickering toward Daly. "Listen, boys, I want t' tell ye a little about it. I know where ye stand in this town, and ye can ruin me if I don't convince ye I ain't so bad.

"I was born with a carnival, and I been in tent shows all my life—bein' everything from a acrobat to a manager. In them early days most circuses and carnivals, specially carnivals, was crooked. Gamblin' wheels run wide open, and most of 'em was braced. Forty-nine camps, short changin', a mob o' grifters—from three card monte men t' confidence boys—all was a part of it. The racket was strong. The only limit on the Forty-nine camp or the 'men only' show was whether or not the show could afford the graft the city officials wanted t' let 'em run. A ticket seller that couldn't make a sucker think he was gettin' ten dollars change with five one dollar bills couldn't get a job.

"That's all I knowed. That was my business, workin' with carnivals then. And when old man Grady, manager and owner o' the Three Star Carnival, decided to work too raw and then got in wrong with the officials o' this town o' Knightsville, I was among them that went t' jail—and plenty—for crooked gamblin' wheels, short changin', and aidin' and abettin' more schemes to separate the rubes from their dough than I got hairs in me head.

"They even prosecuted us because the wild man in the freak show was a tame nigger."

This last remark, with his mouth twisted humorously and those eyes sparkling forth with bold zest, set me off on a laugh in which I wasn't alone. Buck Rariden was sore at the narrow minded rubes who wouldn't let a show do its stuff; that was a cinch.

"That's that. I ain't denyin' it. From the time when I was ten years old and Diamond Front Murphy taught me the shell game and three-card monte, I probably separated more suckers from their kale, and later on managed more people that did, than any man my age. That was up to the war—and I didn't know no better.

"After that—I was a mechanic in the Air Service myself with the 62nd Pursuit—things was different. I got wise t' myself, for one reason. But I ain't claimin' that I suddenly got religion. I still hate t' give suckers an even break."

He was looking at me as he gave vent

to that last remark. I just threw back my head and laughed, uncontrollably. The next second the whole group was chortling loudly. It was like a brief relief from nervous tension, for I think every man had been thinking of Duke Daly. Rariden's face was so naïve at the moment that his wistful statement was irresistibly humorous as well as heartfelt.

AN ORDERLY from the nearby cavalry post came dashing up on a motorcycle, bearing official documents for the captain. During this interruption I drifted a little way from the porch, in the company of Sleepy Spears. Spears was a stocky, square faced young gentleman who always appeared to be in a coma during daylight hours; that is, unless an emergency dropped down among us. Then he acted as if his customary somnolence was merely a device for saving up an unusual supply of energy. He was incorrigibly good humored, a veteran of the patrol, and I believe as mature, mentally, as any active flyer in the whole Army.

I glanced over at the Duke, and Sleepy's heavily lidded eyes gazed drowsily in the same direction. Suddenly a wave of revulsion for what had happened rolled over me.

"Rariden sure knocked the pins from under the Duke," I remarked thoughtfully to Sleepy. "I don't guess he meant it maliciously—"

"He was sore at the moment," Sleepy said gently.

"If I know that Daly bozo at all," I went on, "he's as sensitive as they make 'em. If he ever was a crook, he's suffered over it himself without any public humiliation being necessary to torture him more. And now he's nailed to the cross before the whole gang—"

"And the gang I'll bet he wants to stand in with more than any other," nodded Spears.

I took another look. Daly was just standing there, outwardly as cool and indifferent as ice. Then he looked in my direction, as if reading my thoughts; and I saw suffering eyes.

"Look at the boys," I said venomously. "Not a one of them can keep their eyes off him. The great Duke Daly, professional gambler and racetrack man!"

"It's tough," Sleepy mused. The orderly was getting aboard his throbbing monster, preparing to leave. "I always knew that there was something unusual in his past. He's such a queer duck—always had a shell nobody could get under. Seemed to brood a lot. I wonder if Tex knew—"

"I'm sure he did."

A sudden thought struck me as we started back toward the porch.

"Suppose that maybe his bad leg wasn't the real reason for his leaving the Service so hurriedly?" I inquired. "Maybe they got wise to him and suggested that he resign."

Sleepy considered the suggestion.

"I wouldn't doubt it," he said finally, "but what a stunt he did!"

"Sure. It saved Tex MacDowell's life, and Tex was one man on earth he worships."

"The only one," Sleepy added, "that I believe he gives a damn about, say nothing of actually liking. Well, whatever it is, I feel sorry for him now. That's the penalty of a past. It usually comes up and smacks you in the nose some time."

I stopped him; we were getting within earshot.

"He's supposed to be a sort of assistant for Graves, and you know where Graves stands in the Federal Service," I recalled to him. "It must be Graves knows all about him and doesn't care."

"Uh-huh. Anyhow, damn this Rariden guy for putting him over the jumps that way! Ever think how it would feel to be plastered a crook before your buddies?"

I knew, almost. Whenever one gets caught, publicly, with the goods on—something discreditable, even if only a lie or an unpaid debt—it isn't pleasant.

"For some reason or other, though," I said ruefully, "I can't generate very much of a hate against Rariden."

"Naturally not," smiled Sleepy. "More remarkable, I can't myself, but damned if I don't sympathize with Daly, if he's on the level now!"

"WELL," Captain Kennard was saying as we dropped on the steps, "you were enunciating your philosophy, never to give a sucker an even break."

The stubby, spike pomadoured little C. O. glanced at Daly in a covert manner. You wouldn't think it to look at his battered countenance, or to listen to his forthright, raucous speech, but Cap was softer hearted than a husband while his wife's crying.

The whole bunch shifted their thoughts to Rariden, I guess, as a relief from the knowledge which had come to them with all the effect of a bomb in a bird cage.

If Rariden noted any peculiarity about the spirit of the men, he gave no sign of it.

"But now," he took up his tale, "everything's changed. In the old days, some o' the biggest circuses was crooked. Nowadays, nothin' but a few—quite a few—shyster carnivals is. I ain't sayin' they got religion, either. It just pays better in ev'ry way t' go absolutely straight. Meself, I claim, while I was in th' Army and all that, that I come t' look at things different and there's lots o' things I wouldn't do now if the tent show business was as crooked as the average politician.

"It's that I'm askin' ye t' believe, so help me!"

He appeared to be talking largely to me, as if we had some particular understanding. I think he considered me one sure friend in the flight, at least.

No one said a word for a moment after that plea. Then Kennard cleared his voice.

"No reason why we shouldn't," he proclaimed. "But why should you give a damn whether we do or not?"

"Because," confessed Mr. Buck Rariden with an expansive smile, "I have somethin' up my sleeve t' spring on McMullen."

He hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, spat copiously, and took a wide legged stance. His eyes sparkled out at us, and he set out forthwith to sell something.

"A few days ago our billin' car come in here, with the press agent it carried aboard t' look over the lay o' the land and git things under way. He writes back that a week from now—in fact, only a day after we're supposed t' show here, they's a combination rodeo, picnic and flyin' circus fur the benefit of a hospital. Am I right?"

"You are. It's an annual occasion," I told him.

"Furthermore," he went on, "the thing takes place at the ballgrounds, which I understand is quite large and has stands to hold two or three thousand people already. And you build more seats, temporary—"

"Not us. The town. The hospital is a town affair."

"Sure. And quite a lot o' people come in from the country round about fur the holiday, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, what I want t' put over is this."

His huge, bony body was leaning forward now, a horny forefinger tapping against the palm of his hand, his humorous face alive with enthusiasm.

"First, ye might as well know that the show ain't been doin' so well and all contributions is thankfully received. This might be a godsend to us. However, there are other considerations fur us doin' it—what I'm goin' t' suggest, I mean. One is that we're thinkin' serious like of establishin' winter quarters right here in McMullen instid o' San Antone, where we been winterin' the stock an' equipment fur four or five years. And the hay an' meat an' feed bill fur the animals alone ain't no small item to a few merchants around the town. I mention this t' show why we'll go farther t' git in right with th' town.

"What we want t' do is this. The town's gonna have this big affair t' take

in mazuma. We want t' show the town the same day, make a lot more money for 'em than they could make by themselves, let professional showmen increase the gate, make more money fur themselves as will, we hope, but a cinch t' make more fur the hospital."

"How?" Duke Daly asked easily.

RARIDEN'S eyes darted toward him, and the expression in them darkened. Daly was at ease, but it seemed to me his face was paler than it had been.

"In the first place, you was goin' to have a rodeo in the afternoon. Have part of that in the mornin', instead, and our troupe o' cowboys an' girls'll compete with your local lights from ranches. O' course, a certain number of 'em'll lose on purpose so's the local talent can be happy—"

"They may not have to lay down any," Tex MacDowell drawled. "There are a few boys on the King ranch that could jump into your troupe as stars any time they wanted to."

"All the better! Then it can be on the level. It's always good fur the happiness o' the rubes t' have the local talent win. If Ivan Perzitoloca, born Steve Maloney, our wrestler, shouldn't lose every afternoon and night t' a local wrestler the crowd'd be kickin' like steers over payin' a quarter fur the afterpiece. As it is, the local boy's a hero, his townspeople are happy as pigs in clover, and Steve don't lose a nickel."

This philosophical discourse got a fleeting smile out of even the Duke.

"Well, then, we have the rodeo in the mornin'. The preliminaries, that is. Then the picnic lunch, and a few hours fur the crowd t' sample our midway and the other things ye'll have, o' course. Then, in the afternoon, the finals o' the rodeo, and mebbe some exhibitions by our hands. No afternoon show, far's we're concerned. You'd have your flyin' circus in the afternoon, too.

"I forgot t' mention that we'd put up our seats, which'll hold more'n five thousand people, in that park o' yours. With permanent, temporary and show seats, it looks to me like there could be put up, inside that fence, enough benches fur fifteen thousand people. O' course, that's my estimate, just lookin' at it from th' air—"

"Sure there could," Kennard agreed with him, "but there aren't more than twenty thousand people in the town, including Chinese. I—"

"Wait till ye see a showman work!" grinned the irrepressible Rariden.

He wiped the sweat from his freckled brow and took off his vest. I could see that addressing the mob, as it were, and trying to put over something, was meat and drink to him.

"Now look. Instead o' us chargin' a dollar and a half fur reserved seats and a dollar fur the others, we double that, see? We put up the show without no tent—center poles and riggin' uncovered. We string our lights, and mebbe we can git some searchlights additional. In addition the crowd can buy, for four dollars, meanin' a dollar extra to what they'd pay fur seats at the circus alone, admission to mornin', afternoon and evenin' events. The circus, at capacity fur fifteen thousand people, gits say thirty-three or four thousand dollars. The hospital gets all admissions for mornin' and afternoon, whether it's a combined ticket or not. Our boys and girls join in fur nothin. Out o' the proceeds o' the evenin' show the hospital gits one third."

He stopped and inserted a new plug of tobacco in his cheek. It bulged out like a goat inside a python. I was listening, fascinated by his salesmanship. Sparkling, grinning, his Irish brogue more musical than ever, he certainly did hold attention.

"That," he went on, "is what I call mutually advantageous. In the first place, we win money if we play to a crowd. Our best day's business, even if we sit 'em on the ground inside th' big top, is less'n fifteen thousand dollars at capacity. We get around twenty if we fill that park.

"As fur the hospital, that gits plenty. We put our advance crew, billers, press agints, banner man, checkers, and all, to work everywhere within sixty miles o' McMullen. Your papers do extra publicity, o' coorse. Competin' in a rodeo against circus talent'll draw hundreds more people. The circus itself is a big draw. Everything combines, see? It's a holiday in town, just about, except for stores that want t' clean up. You mean t' say that out of a town o' twenty thousand people, with a drawin' population o' more'n twenty-five thousand, we can't raise fifteen thousand for that evenin' show?"

As we looked at one another, wondering, I came to the conclusion that Mr. Buck Rariden was exactly correct. In fact, it looked to be a reasonable method of getting the hospital easily double the amount it had ever received from the annual benefit.

"Here come the patrol ships," Kennard remarked absently.

He was thinking things over. Two DeHavilands, one coming from the east and the other the west, were growing specks in the sky. Surprising what a relief it was to see them, too! It always was pleasant to have all the ships and flyers snug for the night on the Border. If they weren't home, no one figured they were safe somewhere else. Pilots and observers were assumed to be badly hurt, at least, until proven otherwise. This assumption usually was correct.

AS IF the hum of the motors had called him forth, a short, burly figure appeared in front of the tents, a few yards west of the line of buildings.

"Is that your pilot?" I inquired. "He did a nice piece of flying himself.

"The very same," nodded Rariden. "What d'ye think o' the idea, Slim?"

"Sounds good to me," I told him, my eyes on the approaching airman. "Introduce me, somebody. I might as well say my piece and get it over with."

"Name of Oley Johannsen," stated Rariden impatiently.

He turned to his shipmate and bellowed:

"This is Slim Evans, the boy we threw a line to up above, Oley. He's quiv'rin' t' tell ye how much he appreciates still havin' his faculties."

I shook hands as my eyes met a pair of baby blue ones which gazed vacuously at me. Johannsen's round face was not cherubic; one's pan must have a bit of expression, to my mind, to register even cherubism. His face was like a lump of smooth dough, and it gathered around his eyes until they were just round blue holes. His bullet head was covered, barely covered, with blond hair cropped so close that the skin shone through. His grip was weak and cool. His eyes might have been made of blue glass, and whatever was behind them looked to be empty.

He nodded his acknowledgment of my halting thanks, sat down, and watched the landings of the DeHavilands without saying one solitary word. He had about as much use for speech as a trout has for a Turkish towel.

"The whole idea, if it can be put across, looks like a good bet to me," Kennard said finally, "but why talk to us about it? We have nothing to do with the shindig, except to do some flying to help things on."

"Ye can see how important the thing is t' the show," Rariden explained. "And I know you boys have a lot o' influence in the town. What did I say at th' start? That I wanted ye with me. Ye can see how, if ye went into town and told around that I was a crook, the whole thing'd be spoiled!"

Mr. Oley Johannsen turned his large head slowly. His tongue wet his lips slightly. His round, vacant eyes suddenly held a questioning light in them as they met the Irishman's.

"They got wise t' me bein' in jail, Oley," Rariden told him, biting off his words viciously.

He glanced at Daly, as if to say more, but apparently thought better of it.

"I've laid my cards on the table!"

Rariden roared. "Ye've sized me up. Are ye with me or ag'in' me?"

"You mean," Duke Daly said in level tones, "whether anybody is going to say anything about your past, and whether or not you are to be watched in all your dealings?"

"Right. Are ye goin' around town tellin' 'em t' not trust the whole Barr-Maxwell Circus because I was in jail before the war?"

He was leaning forward belligerently, daring Daly to say yes. Again that taut, uncomfortable feeling was in the air. Daly must have been a man of iron. His own past sins, inferentially greater, possibly, because of the vagueness of Rariden's references, had been thrown in his face. He stood before his brother officers, for he was still a reserve officer, branded. And as far as one could tell, he was scornful of it all and gave not a damn. The fact that I knew better made the ordeal seem more bitter to me.

KENNARD got to his feet. The four patrolmen were striding up the line, after stopping to inspect the circus ship.

"In view of what has been said," the C. O. said deliberately, "the way to do it is this. I'll speak in favor of the whole idea, and no personalities will be mentioned. It will simply be a matter of the town taking the ordinary strict business precautions in dealing with strangers. I'll even go so far as to constantly mention that if the matter is brought to me. It will be, because I'm on the committee handling things. Whether or not you were in jail, Rariden, doesn't cut any ice, if you're show works straight down here."

"That's the way t' talk."

For some reason, he kept looking at me, as if seeking my approval. I nodded.

"Sure, Buck. I don't think the boys will shoot off their mouths any."

Of course, every word of that kind of stuff was a reminder of Daly. He had been pulled down into the mire by Rariden. No one was saying a word, but there were four thoughts about the Duke to one about the showman.

Knowing this, as he must, I was sure that his heart was dead within him and his pride beaten down to earth. But do you think he showed it? He was as upstage as a brand new shavetail.

"That's great! Fine! And what a day for McMullen that'll be!" blared Buck with much exultation.

I saw his pilot staring at him, his face expressionless. Then those blank eyes strayed to the Duke. Daly was looking westward. The sun was a ball of fire floating in multi-colored clouds. Above us a fleet of cumulous clouds were an indescribable color, as beautiful as a bacardi cocktail.

"I'd enjoy a flight right now, Captain," Daly said suddenly. "I'll take a pilot, of course. Haven't flown for three months. How about it? Would you care to go along, Tex?"

"I take over the O. D. in about two minutes, Duke."

"Would you mind going with me, Slim?"

"Not a bit," I told him hastily.

He was always deference itself to anybody. He might have been a thug when he was younger, but he was the kind of gentleman who could carry a cane without looking silly, or push in a lady's chair without being self-conscious.

Rariden took a look at the sky. The wind had died away, and the air was calm and cool. It was the ideal time of day to fly.

"How about it, me bonny Hebrew chauffeur?" he asked boisterously. "I enjoy a bit of playin' aboot meself."

Johannsen shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"If you vant to," he said tonelessly.

"Your enthusiasm," I told him, "reminds me of a crocodile's exuberant disposition. Come on, Duke."

WE GOT our flying clothes. I started to say a word or two of comfort and cheer to the silent Daly, but his reserve kept me from it. He was hard to get close to. I wouldn't

have called him 'old man' any quicker than I'd have chucked Queen Victoria under the chin.

When we got to the line the circus ship was already warming up.

"Pretty fair ship for a show," I remarked. "That stubby two seater'll do one-thirty-five with that Liberty in it."

As if to prove me correct, Johannsen took it off from the line, the narrow way of the field. It zoomed, right off the ground, like a fish skimming up the side of a wave.

"That Johannsen is an excellent pilot, too," he observed in his precise manner.

"Old Rariden is sure a card," I said finally. "Crude, but I'll swear I can't help liking the sucker. Too bad you and he had a run in."

Daly's eyes did not show his thoughts. They were the eyes of an old man, but there was no pain in them.

"What's the difference?" he asked quietly, and that closed the discussion as a pail of water would douse a burning match.

A moment later I had the stick of the ton and a half DeHaviland pressed forward and was shoving the throttle all the way on. We raced across the airdrome. Our takeoff, compared to the Brewster's, was that of an overfed duck's alongside a humming bird.

They were playing around a cloud, two thousand feet high. I made for them, for no particular reason. We got fairly close to them, and I gave Duke the controls. He started handling the ship, and he had himself a time. We skirted the edges of opaque clouds as if curving around cliffs. He'd dive for a cloud, and then zoom mightily up the side of it, playing that he'd avoided a collision. He roared down cañons of fleecy mist, and climbed mountains of it. I glanced around a couple of times, and the blaze in his eyes seemed to be melting the goggles. He surely loved the air.

I scarcely noticed where we were. I sat back and enjoyed myself.

Finally we got over a covey of big clouds. The earth was hidden, except for a few small holes in the mist here and there. With that sun going down, the sky was like a reversed vision of the Grand Cañon of Colorado. Golden spires, crimson mountains, shadowed valleys and pink pastures—all were there.

I'm about as aesthetic as a contented cow, but it got to me. It was awe inspiring. Daly was so thrilled by it that I could see he was unconscious of anything but sheer beauty.

For a moment I soaked my soul in the salubriousness of nature—just before I got soaked!

WITHOUT any warning whatever, there came a shattering crash. In a split second the sturdy roar of the twelve cylinder Liberty had risen to an anguished scream. It was racing itself to pieces. As my hand darted for the throttle something hit me a glancing blow on the head. My helmet flopped loose, and blood was gushing down the side of my face.

The propeller had disintegrated, and a piece of it had hit me.

The Duke was already spiraling down. Below, through the one small opening which was within sight, I could see that the ground was a solid green. Mesquite.

With something of surprise I noted that the circus ship was right behind us, following us down. They had seen the propeller break, and were going to see what happened.

I shook the stick, and took the ship. This was no time for a flyer who'd laid off the air for three months to get back into practise. If what I was afraid of was the truth, what lay ahead was about as simple as going forty miles an hour through Times Square would be with your grandmother at the wheel.

As we burst through the clouds my worst fears were realized. We were about eighteen hundred feet high, and we had drifted out over solid chaparral. The nearest fields, close to the banks of the Rio Grande, were twelve or fifteen miles away.

The Liberty was cut dead, of course. Back of me Daly was as cool as New Year's in Newfoundland. I cursed steadily as we dropped downward, the Brewster close on our tail.

The problem ahead was so simple there was no problem. A man in front of a firing squad has no need for deep cogitation. What lay ahead of me was to collide with a few mesquite trees, aboard of a ton and a half of airplane, at close to seventy miles an hour.

My little prayer to the flyers' gods was the one that pilots have sent on high since the beginning of flying, I guess.

"Don't cripple me too badly; bump me off if you can't leave me reasonably whole."

Such minor appendages as teeth, expendable bones, *et cetera*, had already been stripped from me. Anything else I lost would come under the head of a necessity.

As always in a case like that, I was too sore to be afraid. I cursed the world, myself, the ship and the prop.

I was gliding southeastward, to get as close to help as possible. Three hundred feet, two hundred, fifty. Now we were losing speed rapidly, just skimming the mesquite.

I was lucky, in a way. Ten feet ahead was a thick clump of gnarled trees. I heaved back on the stick. The nose came up feebly—the last dying gasp of the ship. I flipped the right wing down. For a split second we hung there. I tore the goggles from my eyes, left my arm around my head, and relaxed as the right wing crashed down through the foliage.

The snapping of branches, tearing of linen, breaking of struts and spars fairly broke my eardrums. It seemed that a million sharp fingers were tearing at me. My clothes were ripped, my body and face a mass of blood. Then there came quiet as my head hit the ground and nearly broke my neck. Something came down over me, and as my belt broke it seemed that it had carried my stomach away with it.

CHAPTER IV

EXPLANATIONS

I WAS alive and, as I tore at the wreckage, I knew that few, if any, bones were broken.

"Duke!" I was yelling.

"Here!" came a weak voice, and simultaneously two heads—his and my own—poked themselves through the débris. The blood showered down fluently as we shook ourselves free of linen, and splinters of wood rained upon the wreckage below us.

"Glad to see you again," I said, wiping the gore from my eyes with one hand and shaking hands with the other.

"You're looking well," smiled the Duke.

For some reason, we didn't move. We just swayed, like two reeds sticking out of a lake.

I looked upward toward the circus ship. It was swooping down over us. Rariden had his neck about a yard out of the front seat. I waved to him and pointed back toward McMullen, which was only fifteen or twenty miles away. There were fields within three or four miles, down by the river, and DH's could pick us up if they hurried. It would be dark within an hour. Rariden and his loquacious pilot apparently understood, for the ship sped eastward, just over the mesquite.

"Some wreck to survive," I stated, feeling better as my head cleared. "See what happened? The motor hit a tree, and so did the tail. The fuselage snapped right between the two cockpits."

"You're lucky the motor didn't bounce back on you," Daly said calmly.

"As a matter of fact," I told him, "my big toe abuts right on a cylinder head this minute. How about a cigaret?"

He had one, and we both lighted up, still maintaining our positions. In the midst of the crash we were like a couple of masts from a shipwreck.

"You seem absent minded," I remarked. "Worried about Europe or something?"

My levity didn't get a foot. His eyes were gazing abstractedly into the distance.

"I was just thinking about that propeller," he said finally, as if remarking about the climate. "It certainly did break all of a sudden, didn't it?"

"Sure did."

"There wasn't any vibration to warn us either, was there? No hint of its being unbalanced?"

"Nary one. It just became sawdust *pronto*."

"Which isn't very common, if I remember correctly."

"No, it isn't."

"Did you happen to notice where the Brewster was just before that?"

"Say!" I exploded. "What are you driving at? I know you're a full fledged Sherlock Holmes who's been trained under a damn' good man, but—"

"I was just wondering," he said quietly, dragging on his cigaret. He held it with his little finger out, as if it was a cup of tea being imbibed in a drawing room.

"Suppose," he went on in that carefully enunciated speech of his, "that Mr. Buckley Rariden was not at all pleased with the presence of a fellow who knew a lot about him. And suppose—"

"But everybody in the flight knows about him now," I said in a highly bewildered manner. "Getting rid of you—and how in the name of the good Lord are you blaming him for it? Can't you—"

"Suppose, anyhow, that he was afraid that my knowledge, plus our little feud, would work against him in matters of importance. And then we'll say that he gets his ship close to us, when we are over deadly country, and he draws a gun. He is a good shot. He takes careful aim from behind, and shoots into our propeller so that we'll have to crack up in the mesquite—"

"And a couple of corpses a likelihood!" I exploded. "After all, that's so simple I might have thought of it myself."

WE WERE silent for a minute, as I turned it over in my mind. I was stunned. I'm just a big acorn eater from the sovereign State of Utah, who can't figure ahead far enough to make an intelligent move at checkers. Far from being in advance of any one's else mental processes, I'm always two jumps behind, striving desperately to catch up. Nevertheless:

"Duke, it was right funny about that prop, and it could have happened as you say," I said finally, "but listen. The whole wad was shot this afternoon. If he got rid of you, the rest of us knew that he'd been a jailbird. You know that. So what good would it do him?"

"He might figure that his frank speech had got you all on his side. He and I had a little public tiff. He doesn't care for me so much, I don't imagine. I didn't act very much impressed, possibly. He might think that I would be working continually to interfere with his plans. Whereas you have temporarily capitulated to him, it might be that I could eventually work from within to undermine him, see?"

"Then it comes down to the fact that you think it possible that he would deliberately try to kill you and me for revenge on you and to make his plans a success?" I asked him point blank.

"In view of what happened, I think it a possibility, yes," Daly answered imperturbably. His sudden desire to do more flying this afternoon was rather unusual, too. I may be wrong, but I may not be, in which case—"

"You've got to figure his plans as damn' important, and probably crooked!" I finished for him.

Daly nodded, those remarkable gray eyes resting on me with a luminous glow in them.

"I'll admit that prop thing was strange, but it could happen," I said flatly, "but I'll be damned if I think that big Irishman would set out to murder you and me this afternoon!"

"Let's talk as we walk," Daly suggested evenly.

We started south, and he continued:

"That would depend on two things. One is whether he's the type of Irishman who can get into murderous rages when his vanity is hurt. The other is how important his plans at McMullen are."

"Listen, Duke," I said very slowly. "Have you shot the works about Rariden? Do we all know all you know about him? Did his story cover the ground thoroughly?"

"In a way, yes; but you'd have to know that old carnival outfit he was with—or any one like it—to appreciate what I say. An outlaw aggregation, composed of the roughest, toughest men and women you ever saw. Wandering Bedouins, with every man's hand against them, and always getting away with murder in the enemy's territory, so to speak. By that I mean that they were always a little group, taking chances in a tough town.

"Did you ever see a 'hey, rube'? Well, that would show what I mean. Any one of those boys, all rules of fair fighting forgotten, could cripple and kill a dozen townsmen and do it quickly. Talk about hard boiled eggs! In that outfit Buck had to maintain his own authority by right of might. He not only fought alongside his thugs, but fought them too, if necessary. He handled a drunken, roistering, crooked, tough bitten crew of grifters, dips, hoboes and showmen, as well as any tough mobs from outside that came their way."

"Some education might be got from a school like that," I nodded.

"You can't figure that delicate repugnance for coarse methods would be a characteristic of the star pupil, could you?"

"Might figure that he'd shy at murder."

"Sure, but not necessarily."

I was bound to admit that. Nevertheless, I was uneasy and sore and scared. Probably it was because Buck Rariden had saved my life. But it was more than that. There was something boyish in the big, homely, mocking Irishman, which I liked tremendously. He seemed like a playboy. Magnetism and all the rest of it were in him and I liked him.

"Probably I'm cuckoo, but I can't believe it!" I told him.

"Haven't learned yet never to give anybody the best of it, have you?"

SUDDENLY I was aware of something. During that whole conversation Daly had treated the proposition of a double murder as not at all remarkable; in fact, as a matter of course. He had discussed it as coolly, with as little appreciation of the fact that it might be a bit out of the ordinary, as I would have discussed the possibility of a poor propeller's having been shipped us by accident.

"God, he's hard!" I remember thinking to myself. I looked sidewise at that boyish face. "Pro gambling was light parlor diversion for this *hombre*, I guess."

After all, you must admit that murder, while making rapid strides, has not yet come to the place where it is really approved without reservation in the best circles.

We plodded along silently. I was trying desperately to do a little unprejudiced thinking. Finally I succeeded, I guess.

"Listen, Duke," I burst forth. "I'm not a complete and total fool, of course. And I realize that what you say has some foundation, and that it's a possibility. In fact, that we ought to act, from now on, as though it was a proved fact that Buck Rariden and his pilot are murderers. That means that they're up to something. Reading from left to right, that means that the festive flyers and the teetering townspeople ought to do something about it."

"Without doing any injustice to the showmen," nodded Daly, "until my dime novel deliberations are proved true."

"Just have everybody on their guard at all times, huh?"

"I'd go even further. He seems to think a lot of you. I've often noticed that when one man does a great favor for another, the recipient often thinks less of his benefactor, through an inferiority complex or something—"

"Whereas the guy that helped the other likes him more."

"Exactly. The other one has helped fatten his ego."

"Buck must love me," I stated. "He wanted to get me heaven bound *via* airship, mesquite and fire."

"You wouldn't stand in the way of his own welfare, perhaps," Daly suggested. "Anyhow, I was thinking of this. In the dim event that he tried to bump us off, he was after me. If he was after me, it was because he has plans which will brook no interference. If that's the case, they probably concern his show and its appearance here. Maybe the show just plans to work strong during their day here, and clean up plenty. I—"

"Or, granting that you're right, he sees so much profit here—legitimate profit—that he doesn't want to be interfered with."

"Perhaps. Plus a suddenly generated hatred for me, that might spell a sudden impulse to get rid of me when there was no chance for detection. He's Irish, with the temper of a devil. Anyhow, from all angles, I think it would be a good thing if you cultivated him, and finally, on the plea of a vacation and that sort of thing, asked him to let you go back to the show with him and spend a few days. Then you could look over the lay of the land, see?"

Tired and weak as I was, I did a few comical capers through the chaparral.

"That has signs of genius," I approved. "It'll be a whale of a lot of fun for me, any way you take it."

"And if he refuses, it will be almost an admission that the show has something to hide," Daly went on with calm logic.

"Exactly. And say, Duke. I didn't see any guns on either one of 'em when they took off."

"Neither did I. But they might have had one in the ship, or got one when we weren't looking or something. You think I'm crazy, Slim. Perhaps I am. The chances are ten to one I'm wrong. But you don't know the type, and I do!"

CHAPTER V

COUNT FRIEDERICH VON STERNBERG

AN HOUR later we landed at the airdrome with the aid of the night lights, and shortly thereafter we were enjoying a slight collation in the company of the rest of the flight. As guests, we had Messrs. Buck Rariden and Oley Johannsen. Furthermore, it had been found out, through exhaustive research on the part of several members of the flight that no guns had been observed upon the bodies and persons of either one of the showmen; that no gun had been in the ship as far as the mechanics had noticed; that both men owned Colts, which were then reposing in the tents to which they had been temporarily assigned, and that both guns were fully loaded and, if fired recently, had been thoroughly cleaned. Mr. Oley Johannsen's gun showed signs of recent cleaning.

That, of course, made little difference. Whoever had fired the shot, if any, was a minor detail. And either or both could have had guns beneath their clothing. In fact, they would almost surely have concealed them.

Furthermore, the trusty master sergeant had stated without equivocation that the propeller had been almost new, had been tested for balance and inspected enthusiastically but a few days before. It was about as liable to explode with a loud report in mid air as a four ten truck would be to turn turtle because it ran over a piece of string.

Which left matters, in a manner of speaking, high up in the air.

BOTH men were entirely lacking in self-consciousness. Buck was as humorous and peppy as ever, except when he looked at Daly; and Deadpan Oley was himself. The events of the day had put Buck into high good humor, which he gave vent to most boisterously. It seemed that he had a couple of friends named Pat and Mike, who had had myriad adventures which he rehashed with gusto. Some of their circus experiences were well worth a cocked ear on the part of a traveling salesman. Even Duke Daly laughed.

I say "even Duke Daly" because of the situation. He had entered the dining hall without giving a sign of embarrassment. The boys couldn't help showing that his presence was a sort of wet blan-

ket, because they were so keenly aware of his humiliation that it was hard to be natural. He acted as if daring them to say a word, even think a thought, about him. That public appearance must have been an ordeal, more so for him than the average man. He sat next to Tex, and not even MacDowell could be himself until Rariden's Rabelaisian tales had broken the ice a little bit.

There had come a lull in Rariden's chatter when the entire table became paralyzed with astonishment. Oley Johannsen, out of a clear sky, gave utterance to speech. No one had coaxed or urged him. It was his own original idea.

"I think I like to go to the jail and see the robbers," he declared calmly.

"Say, so would I!" proclaimed Rariden. "Those boys had their nerve with 'em. Oley is gonna fly back to th' show tomorrow. I'll be around a couple o' days or more t' git things fixed up. Cap, d'ye think it might be arranged with the sheriff t' take a look at 'em tonight?"

"Sure. Which reminds me, now that Penoch is here, there's been so much low and lofty conversation that it slipped my mind. I wonder—the airplane and all—whether the Von Sternberg bunch had anything to do with that holdup?"

"Sounds like 'em!" boomed Penoch. "I'd say it was a cinch if he wasn't in jail himself, or in the jail hospital, that is."

"By the way," Daly slid in smoothly, "I'd like to hear what you know about this Von Sternberg and his gang, O'Reilly."

"Me too!" declared Rariden. "I remember the name—"

"You ought to! He's the bozo that came damn' near to stealing the biggest dirigible in the world right from under the noses of its crew and twenty thousand people!" roared O'Reilly. "The *America* is the ship and El Paso the town, where he's now sick in jail."

"Sure!" agreed Rariden. "I didn't see the papers fur two or three days after it happened, so I didn't know the whole of it."

"You think the holdup might have been pulled by part of his gang?" Daly questioned O'Reilly.

Suddenly I remembered that Daly had been told that he might have to go into Mexico to investigate that same outfit. It was a new idea to me, connecting the holdup with Von Sternberg. The use of a plane made it seem possible, at that.

"Sure," stated O'Reilly.

He leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigaret. You might as well take a good look at Lieutenant Percival Enoch O'Reilly, at that.

In the first place, he was the smallest man I'd ever seen, in height. He'd have to stand on a stepladder to look over the edge of a basement window. Just about five feet tall, but his body was powerful—broad shouldered, straight legged, and hard as rock.

Above it his face was round and smooth and firm, decorated with a tiny, cocky little mustache waxed to points sharp enough to spear a turtle on the wing. It had been bleached blond by the sun, as had his eyebrows. The said hirsute adornments shaded a pair of brown eyes which were just about the doggondest orbs a man ever owned. His whole being radiated vitality, but those eyes were leaping pools of reckless life. They glowed and sparkled and burned, as if shooting forth sparks of excess energy. His hair was a color all its own. Take the hue of a drunkard's nose, the tint of a hazy sunset when the sun's a ball of fire, and the color of a flapper's lips just after she's wielded a wicked lipstick, mix 'em up together, and the result would be a pale pink alongside the hue of Penoch's hair.

It was the most fortright, unashamed and shrieking red I've ever seen. He parted it in the center and brushed it smoothly. That made his face seem as square as a die, and threw into relief his powerful jaw. The fact that his countenance was tanned to mahogany, and that those eyebrows and the tiny moustache were blond, made it truly startling. There was something pixielike and elfin about it, as if every spike of hair was bristling with life. He had adventured all over the world without losing his

irrepressible love of life, and he could take care of himself in a more versatile manner than most of the men I'd known. His exploits in the Air Service, from France to the Philippines, were famous. He'd been court martialed dozens of times, orders being a small thing when they ran counter to his personal plans.

To top off the contradictions in the granitelike little squirt, the voice, usually with a laugh in it, which arose from that miniature body was a deep bass.

"WELL," he said after he'd got his cheroot ignited, "I got to know Von Sternberg when we were both instructors in the Mexican Air Service. He was a German ace during the war, and now he's an adventurer who still nourishes a hate for the United States because they got into the war and helped lick him.

"As near as we can find out, he runs a big aerial smuggling gang for two reasons —one to make money, and the other to annoy this country. He's got guts, a sense of humor, and a big head. The kind of a bozo that would like to be a Robin Hood or something. Fly over and drop a note to this flight, say, informing them that he'd put something over the night before.

"We first ran into him—I may say that he and I have a personal feud, so he picks on this section of the Border—on a smuggling deal. We nabbed two pretty high class aids of his on that, but he escaped. Then I'm damned if he don't send one of his men, an Englishman, in here to visit this flight, as a sort of preparation for a big deal. We killed him off, a little later, when he joined with Von Sternberg and others to try to swipe the dirigible *America* while she was moored at El Paso."

Rariden's laugh rang from the rafters. Daly, his face impassive, was listening without moving a muscle.

"What a broth of a boy!" Buck chuckled.

"The size of it seems to be," Kennard cut in, "that he's gathered a considerable group of aids together who worship him, and he's become an aerial bandit. He must be popular down there with the peons, because he's never caught. And he raids the Border, so to speak, to annoy the United States—"

"And probably to stir up trouble between the two countries," Penoch interrupted. "The government being officially friendly to us, Von Sternberg's just the kind that would foment a revolution and aim to be secretary of war or something when it was over. Meanwhile, he's just making this Border—or was—as troublesome as possible. Smuggling, kidnaping, raiding, all by airplane. Now, of course, he's in the hospital at El Paso, and things have been very quiet."

"You put him there when you kiboshed his stealin' the balloon, eh?" interjected Rariden.

"Uh-huh."

"There's another string to his bow, too," Captain Kennard told Daly. "It seems that he went into the oil business in Mexico just after Penoch left the Mexican Air Service flat. He wasn't any too particular about his methods, and got the big companies, mostly American, down on him. As a result, when he finally struck oil and had a fortune in his grasp, they put the screws on him. Wouldn't buy his oil, or pump it for him, see? So Von Sternberg just starts in to get back at them by robbing their payrolls when they sent them down through the fields. He had a gang of several dozen men, and probably hundreds of others who were sympathetic with him. He forced the big companies into sending their payrolls by air. Right now, or before we got him, he was going into the business of robbing the aerial paycars."

"The situation, then," Daly said in his precise way, "is that he was a natural leader, with a small army of his own, just raising hell down in Mexico and along the Border without being interfered with."

"Exactly," nodded Penoch. "You see, Americans in the oil fields aren't popular. A certain proportion of Mexicans think that we've gone in there, got all the oil, and are pauperizing their country without

them getting any benefit from it. Von Sternberg, making it tough for Americans, became a very popular man with the rank and file of peons. He added to that popularity deliberately. His exploits are sort of sagas down there. No Mexican, probably, would turn him in or help capture him. The government seems helpless. Of course, Mexico City may be anxious to get him, we'll say, but the local officials may try to nab him with their tongues in their cheeks."

Johannsen was listening, round eyed and silent. He hung on every word, and I thought that the picture of this superbandit had actually kindled a flame of interest within him.

"WHAT sort of a looking bird is he?" Daly inquired evenly.

"About six feet two, good looking in a blond, strong way, powerful as an ox, a great smile, as crooked as a horse's hind leg and out for the good of No. 1," Penoch answered.

"You and he have a private feud, you said?"

"Uh-huh. And he got me in a shape where I was about ready to leave the Border for my health, too. It started over a girl, sister of a friend of mine. I'd love to choke him to death for it, and tried to.

"Then it so happened that I got into a mess with a rebel general down there, and finally killed him to escape. He was more or less of an idol with several thousand of his followers. If they knew who killed their boss one or two of 'em, at least, would trail me to Singapore to bump me off. Von Sternberg knows I did it. Just before we got him he tried, through this Englishman, to force me to join his gang to keep him from setting a few bloodthirsty spigs on my trail. That's the way, I think, that he got most of his leading lieutenants, renegade flyers, and so forth. By blackmailing them, I mean, even if he had to frame 'em first."

"I see," nodded the Duke. "The question is, whether his gang will continue to operate without their leader."

"A boy like that," chuckled Rariden, "should have some other spalpeens in his crowd that would be capable of takin' the lead. Ye really think that maybe some of his men had somethin' t' do with the train robbery?"

"Who can tell?" Penoch shrugged. "The airplane feature of it would almost make it seem as though there was a possibility, wouldn't it?"

"As ye say, who can tell?" repeated Rariden as he got to his feet. "Well, who's goin' down t' see the prisoners with Oley and me? Ye'll call the sheriff, Captain?"

"Sure will."

Jimmy Jennings and Jack Beaman decided to go along and take a look at the bandits. The rest of us adjourned to the recreation room. There was a complete representation of the flyers, except for Beaman and Jennings. We were just about to scatter into bridge and poker when Duke Daly, leaning against the mantlepiece as he puffed a cigaret, said suddenly—

"There's something I'd like to settle with the flight."

I looked up quickly. I sensed the timbre in his voice. I saw Tex sidle over toward him, as if he too sensed something. The flyers stopped whatever they were doing, and every eye was trained on the slim, blond chap whose eyes were narrowed as if to hide what was in them. His face was in the shadow, so all that I could see was its clean cut features, without any expression whatsoever.

Daly examined the tip of his cigaret for a moment, and then he started to talk, calmly, and very, very coldly.

"Rariden, this afternoon, said bluntly that I had no right to talk about him or any one else," Daly said, "because I was a crook. He is absolutely correct."

"Oh, shut up, for heaven's sake!" Tex told him gruffly.

Daly never so much as turned an eye on Tex. Now he was looking at us, his gaze shifting coolly from face to face. I got just a glimpse of the terrible suffering in his eyes, and it made me crawl to

think of what was going on behind that cold exterior.

"I'm simply telling you, so that no one will be under any misapprehension," Daly went on. "I don't care to stick around without an invitation. The facts of the matter are these. I ran away from home when I was fifteen, and for several years, as a starving hobo and other things, I was, in a manner of speaking, a part of the underworld. Finally, when I was at the end of my rope, a professional gambler picked me up and made me his partner. For months we played crooked poker together.

"After that, I was a betting commissioner on the racetrack, and other things—honest, even from the world's point of view. However, I've been a crook. I'm not calling for a showdown now."

He tossed his cigaret into the fireplace, his eyes flashing from face to face with disdain—but heartbreak in his eyes.

"I'm turning in. The question is whether I shall continue to live out here at the airdrome or not. We may have to cooperate on business affairs, of course. I would rather live here. But it doesn't make any difference. I don't want to contaminate anybody.

"Talk it over, and Tex can tell me whether I'm invited or not. And don't strain yourselves or try to be nice. Night, everybody."

Outwardly composed, a sort of statue of ice walked out the door. And I was glad he had. It had been almost unbearable, and I'm not so sensitive, to see him going through that ordeal—all the more so because his iron control was such that one sensed his emotions rather than saw them.

NO SOONER had his footsteps ceased to resound from the porch than Tex MacDowell, his eyes a pair of coals in his head, was laying down the law.

"Before anybody says a word," he burst forth, "let me say something. I've known all this, and a lot more, from Duke's own mouth for years. I know this, too. He's peculiar, because he's built up a shell around himself. During his starving years, kicked around and debarred from the kind of society he was born for, he sort of lived an inner life all his own. Now that he's up in the world, he's the most cynical, hard boiled egg I ever saw. He can't forget the time when nobody had a good word for him.

"For that reason, some of the boys never did cotton to him when he was an active flyer. Couldn't place him. Thought he was superior and conceited. It all came down to his being sensitive; get me?

"Now here's what I started in to say. Kennard knows it as well as I do, but we're the only ones. When he was a flyer and he and I went down to collect dope on what we thought was a bandit's rendezvous, disguised, we ran into that same old gambler, named Young, who'd picked the Duke up as a kid and taught him to gamble.

"At that time Daly's father and mother were alive, and he was heart and soul a flyer. We got the dope, and then this bird Young simply put it up to the Duke. He admitted everything, but said that if the Duke didn't keep hands off, that he, Young, would spill all he knew. That would mean Duke's public disgrace, cashiered from the Army, and probably the death of his old parents in Louisville. They didn't know a thing about the seamy side of Daly's career. He'd always lied to 'em by letter.

"Know what kind of a Border patrolman, officer, gentleman, or whatever you want, Daly was? He told me all about it, and told Young and his gang to do their worst. In other words, he risked ruin to do his duty, and it was only the luck that killed Young which kept Daly's disgrace from being published all over the country.

"Am I right, Cap?"

"Sure!" rasped the captain. "Anybody in this gang that doesn't feel as though he could treat the Duke right—"

"Great Almighty!" roared Penoch

O'Reilly. "Are we being kidded? What the hell do you think we are—babies? I never saw so much—"

"Listen, squirt," MacDowell cut in gently. "I know how you feel. But you don't understand Daly. When anybody's nice to him, he wonders what they're after. He figures that if he wasn't in the position he is, no one would have any use for him. He figures that if his supposed friends knew his past he'd be kicked off their front stoops. All that sort of thing. And he hates himself more or less, although he isn't ashamed of what he did because it was a necessity at the time.

"Consequently, my boy, it becomes a very delicate matter. The point is not to avoid the subject, or to treat him especially nicely. Just normally. In fact, if anybody here could be trusted to kid about his past in just the right way, it would be a godsend. Being too considerate would ruin Daly much more certainly than being cool to him. Coolness he'd fight back—just another tough break to be forgotten, as far as he was concerned. See his position? He, of a good family and with every right instinct in the world, made a mistake, and he's paying for it for the rest of his life, he figures, by either being barred from his own kind or getting by with them by deceiving them about his past."

"The proper caper," Kennard suggested, "is for us all to act as though we were saying, 'Sure, we know you were a crooked gambler. What the hell? You're a good guy now, so forget it. We aren't angels ourselves.' "

"Exactly!" nodded Sleepy Spears.

"That was a grandstand play of his," observed fat little Dumpy Scarth who, even under these circumstances, couldn't quite forgive another man's holding the center of the stage.

"No, it wasn't," Tex corrected him. "For the ordinary man, maybe yes. It would have been a plea for sympathy. That wasn't the way Duke meant it. He meant it like this. He was saying, 'Here are my cards on the table, damn you, and do as you please about 'em.' "

"But not enjoying showing his hand," I remarked.

"Nary bit," boomed Penoch O'Reilly. "Oh, well, that's that. I understand how he feels."

Gradually the tenor of the conversation changed to Rariden, and finally Captain Kennard said—

"If you're going to cultivate him and travel with that show for a few days you should have gone down to the jail with him, Slim."

"I suppose I should, but this has been a tough day for me," I informed the C. O. "I can tag him around tomorrow and next day. I don't think there'll be any trouble."

"If there is, it'll make your suspicions seem somewhat more reasonable," Kennard stated. "Well, I'm going over to the office and sign two thousand more of these reports. If we had half as many men in the field as we've got reading reports in Washington, our standing Army would make the armies of all Europe look like a Boy Scout troupe."

TEX WANDERED away—in search of the Duke, I imagined—and I settled down to a few quiet hands of poker with Sleepy Spears, Penoch O'Reilly, big George Hickman and Pop Cravath, our fat and fiery adjutant.

I was just in the middle of an important decision as to whether to raise before the draw on queens and sixes when Captain Kennard appeared in the doorway. He clumped into the room noisily, and his prominent gray eyes were like headlights in his square, battered countenance.

I took a look at him and laid down my cards.

"I'll make up my mind later," I announced. "What's the news, Cap?"

The captain sank down in a chair, and fished a radiogram from his pocket.

"Hold everything," he said. "Count Friederich Von Sternberg got away clean about three quarters of an hour ago, and is free as air in Mexico this minute!"

CHAPTER VI

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF OLEY JOHANNSEN

"WHAT?"

It was a roar which would make the squawk of the Bull of Bashan seem like the tweet of a canary bird, and it burst from the lips of Penoch O'Reilly. The little fellow was on his feet as if he had been bounced from his chair. In a trice he was planted firmly, short legs wide apart, braced for any shock.

The rest of us were open mouthed.

"He must have been shamming sickness, eh?" I managed to articulate none too clearly.

"Evidently," barked Kennard. "It was done like this. Two big cars came driving up to the hospital at Fort Bliss. A couple of bozoes in Army uniforms, one a major and the other a captain, came in and demanded to see Von Sternberg. Claimed to be from Washington, the way I got it over the long distance phone. I called up after the radiogram.

"Anyway, they went into see him. He was supposed to be unable to walk on one leg at all. They overcame the orderly without a sound, and lowered Von Sternberg out the window. In a few seconds the two cars were going hell bent for El Paso.

"Each car had machine guns in it—two apiece, evidently. Anyway, they sprayed these machine guns in the air, front and back, at the last end of the trip through El Paso, when the police were trying to stop 'em. Naturally, not even a hundred men at once are going to line up across a road with machine guns pointed at 'em—and nobody's going to pursue a car very closely when it has a machine gun covering the rear.

"They had everything figured out, of course. The two cars were found three miles west of El Paso, along the river, by airplanes. The planes got there just too late. The gang had disappeared. Must have had airplanes planted on the edge of the river, because there wasn't a one of the outlaws in sight and the flyers were on the job within ten minutes, at the outside, of the time when the cars could have been abandoned."

"Well, I'll be damned!" breathed O'Reilly, and suddenly that square face of his had aged ten years. "We've got to get that bozo, Cap! Not only because he can ruin me, but gosh!—this Border'll be tough as long as he operates."

"And what a gang of men he must have with him!" Kennard said dreamily. "Guts and brains and—"

"A blind worship for their chief," I finished up for him.

"Well," stated George Hickman, "this Englishman St. John that turned out to be one of his right bowers was sure no slouch."

Kennard was pacing up and down the room with short, choppy strides.

"An organization that can steal an important prisoner right out from under the noses of the Army is sure going to be no picnic for a few DeHavilands," he said, half to himself. "Say, Daly would be interested in this. If he has any idea of going down into Mexico and investigating this bird at first hand—"

"What's the excitement?" came a familiar voice, and Buck Rariden strode in at the head of the quartette of jail visitors.

He had added to his costume of vest, overalls and blue shirt a felt hat which had evidently been bought during the Spanish-American war and been sat on since that time very frequently.

When the bunch heard the news they took it in divers fashions. The flyers, realizing that combat lay ahead, cursed feelingly. Oley Johannsen's vacuous blue eyes lighted up dimly, and his lips moved without any words coming. Buck Rariden threw back his head, and a wave of hilarity washed out of his mouth and over us, and before we knew it we were grinning.

"What a broth of a bhoy!" he gasped finally. "Saints preserve us! I ain't laughin' at ye, boys, honest I ain't. But just thinkin' o' that big bozo, hellin' around, stealin' dirigibles, escapin' when

four regimints are watchin' him, and runnin' his section o' Mexico as he damn' plazes—sure an' it's enough to make me tip me hat to 'im with respict, even though I was shootin' him at the moment!"

DALY came in, followed by Tex. Jimmy Jennings had slipped out to get him. The contained ex-gambler asked about four terse questions. Perhaps years of training under as great an investigator as Graves had helped make him that competent and incisive, but certain it was that I felt a sort of confidence in him. If any man could beat Von Sternberg he could.

"It looks to me," he said finally, "as though what is in Graves' mind is the only way out. Von Sternberg has been raising merry hell with American oil men—and with America herself along this Border. I guess—"

He stopped talking, probably due to the presence of the circus men. I knew what was on his mind, though, and when he and Penoch O'Reilly got together in a corner I was certain of it. For weeks before, the capture of the German, Penoch had been wild to conduct a personal expedition into Mexico and fight it out with his ancient enemy right in his own stronghold. Penoch was much worried over what would happen to him if Von Sternberg talked. I guess a knife would be addressed to Penoch's back within a day after certain Mexicans knew who had killed their general.

Before the conversation was over I had casually broached the subject of a few days with the circus.

"I'm going to take a leave and rest up, especially now that old Von is on the loose again," I stated. "How about me going back with you, old-timer, and seeing circus life for a few days? I'll drive stakes or anything."

"Sure!"

It was as hearty and whole souled a consent as one would care to hear. Every airman's eye had been on the big Irishman when I'd asked the question—and if he had anything to hide he was an actor who would make Edwin Booth the leading man of the Squeedunk Firemen's annual entertainment.

"It'll be great fur the show, too!" enthused Rariden. "See? The publicity'll be out, and reporters'll interview ye, and ye can tell 'em what a great guy I am, and what I did, and the rest of it.

"Oley, don't let me fergit t' send a note by you t' the Old Man when ye go tomorrow. Slim, ye'll wait two or three days fur me t' git through here, eh? Sure. Maybe we can fly up, huh? Have two ships with the show. It's be great publicity."

He went on enthusiastically, while Deadpan Oley registered no interest whatever. He seemed to be rolling the subject of Von Sternberg under his tongue.

I staggered into bed a little later, and I think I was walking in my sleep during the last half of the journey down the boardwalk. I was so tired I wouldn't have run a hundred yards for a five thousand dollar prize. I came near lying on the ground because it took an effort to climb into bed.

I slept until eleven o'clock in the morning. The captain, in view of the events of the previous day, allowed me to miss the sweet strains of reveille.

I PARTOOK of lunch with the gang, Sing Hi, our Chink, deigning to fix me some scrambled eggs as a special favor.

I managed to raise my heavy eyelids high enough to take observations about the board.

"Where are our goggle eyed guests, the ornaments of the Barr-Maxwell Circus?" I inquired.

"Buck Rariden is galloping over the town of McMullen, high wide and handsome," chuckled Kennard. "By the way, seen the morning paper?"

"No."

"Well, the holdup and your little adventure is spread all over the front page, of course," I was informed. "That makes Buck Rariden one of the biggest men in

town. He's got everybody from the mayor to the Rotary Club dizzy."

"Did anybody give them any advance info on the peculiar coincidence of a broken propeller without any visible reason therefore?" I inquired oratorically.

"No," answered Kennard. "I did put a flea in a few ears about watching their steps and not letting any show business slickers take advantage of them, but that's all. Really wasn't justified in anything else. They'll be watched, though."

"I happened to go with Buck to Mayor Sam's sanctum," drawled MacDowell, "and his proposition seems on the up and up. The town is to sell the season tickets, as it were—I mean the tickets admitting to everything—and the circus itself will only handle the cash that's taken in for the night show individually."

"The show is trusting the honesty of the townspeople then, rather than *vice versa*," commented Daly. "That sounds on the level."

"Sure. Of course, the business men'll look at things with a very sharp eye, and be on their guard. After all, that's all that's necessary at this time," Kennard said. "Rariden might be a crook, but still go into the project on the level. It's a good proposition without any dirty work. He may also be a murderer, as you and Slim suspect, but as long as he didn't get away with you he'll be forced to go straight on the deal. Somehow or other, that nick, I believe—"

"Here I come, laughin' and scratchin'!" came a voice from the doorway.

"How's tricks?" asked Jimmy Jennings, and the twinkling eyed, horse faced Irishman beamed over the table as he replied:

"Great. I got this town right by the left ear. They're fallin' fur Buck Rariden, showman, hero and all around promoter, until they're tryin' to kiss me. We might be startin' tomorrow, Slim. It's gettin' along fast I am, and no mistake. And why not?" he asked us individually and collectively. "One of the smartest propositions ever put up to a bunch o' suckers! Barr-Maxwell'll come in here and show this town a day they'll be rememberin' of fur years t' come. Every cripple on his bed o' pain'll have an extra dose o' medicine, the nurses'll be prettier and more of 'em—it's philanthropists we are, and no mistake!

"Did Oley wire from Donovan Field?"

"Haven't heard a word," Pop Cravath told him.

"Huh? Shouldn't take him more'n three hours, even by the railroad, should it?"

"No. Scarcely that."

"And he started at seven-thirty by the clock!"

Rariden ran his hands through that sandy hair, and gazed at his plate moodily.

"And now it's twelve-thirty. If the show loses that eighteen thousand dollar ship in a crackup, it's tough it'll be. Begad, I'm gonna call up the field."

"He was supposed to wire, was he?" I asked.

"Sure. The show's playin' Seguin, but he was to stop fur gas at Donovan, and wire that all was O. K. Well, I'll chow first."

CHAPTER VII

OTHER DEVILS UNCHAINED

BUCK RARIDEN was slightly distraught, though, and I could imagine why. Losing that ship meant an eighteen thousand dollar cash loss to the show, and he was already worrying over the fate of the taciturn pilot.

"There isn't any likelihood of his forgetting to wire—"

"He never forgits nothin'!" Rariden told us. "He's the most reliable man that ever kept his mouth shut, his ears open and his eyes on the ball. In fifteen years around shows he's never failed to be Johnny on the spot."

"Where'd he learn to fly?" I asked casually.

"In the navy, durin' the war. Save me desert. I'm goin'."

"If he took the railroad—" started Dumpy Scarth, and Rariden interrupted from the door:

"He did. He would. He don't take no extra chances. He knowed there was fields along there."

"Then he's probably all right, if he did have a forced landing," Daly pointed out. On the other hand, there are few places where he couldn't have got to one of those funny little stations and a telegrapher within two hours," I reminded the group at large.

Fifteen minutes later Buck was back, his face lugubrious.

"He ain't been in to Donovan Field at all, at all, and he ain't been seen by the show. He's down somewheres, boys!"

Kennard was on his feet. In that deserted wilderness of mesquite a flyer who was half an hour overdue became a potential tragedy. Always and forever stalking the men who rode their DeHavilands up and down the river was that second most terrible of disasters, wrecked and crippled, starving and suffering, helpless and far from succor of any kind.

"He started up the railroad and there is no reason to think he left his course. He couldn't get lost. I'll get Donovan ships on the northern end, and we start now. MacDowell! Scarth! Jennings! Have your ships warmed up. Pop, radio Donovan Field to have three ships start searching southward from San Antone. First afternoon patrolmen be ready to relieve the first searching party as soon as you return."

Other orders crackled forth. I went out on the westward patrol toward Laredo, with Jack Beaman in the back seat. When we returned the three searching ships had just landed. Buck Rariden was there, rushing into the field in none other than a municipal car.

Tex MacDowell gave the report.

"We flew up the railroad, me over it, Jimmy and Dumpy flying parallel to me and about ten miles to my left and right. There wasn't a single sign of him or his ship anywhere!"

"But he's got to be somewhere!" said Rariden.

"The only solution must be that he decided to make a beeline for San Antone," decided the captain, "and somewhere up the railroad angled off northwest. Next ships start where the first three left off, on the west, and take a strip thirty miles wide."

We were off, Pete Miller, Captain Kennard and myself, flying ten miles apart and combing every inch of the mesquite for a distance of a hundred miles. There we saw the Donovan ships in the air, doing the same thing. And there was not a sign of his wreck.

AT FOUR o'clock the next afternoon, after flying since dawn from both Donovan Field and McMullen, I stumbled wearily from my ship. Behind me were Kennard and Pete, falling out of their ships. We rambled up to the gathering on the steps of the recreation building, our eyes asking wordless questions.

"Not a word," Pop exploded nervelessly.

"And not a word from us," Kennard mumbled as he sank down. "He's disappeared from the face of the earth."

"Probably not that," Daly said evenly.

Daly still was not exactly a part of the flight. We treated him as naturally as we could, which was naturally enough, but he was more or less of a stranger, sitting in and saying little. I think he was too self-conscious to push himself at all, and he was anxious to show us that he did not consider himself to have even as much right to comment as we had.

"What do you mean?" Tex asked him.

"You know. If he came down in the chaparral, and burned—a charred motor underneath the trees isn't easy to spot."

We were all silent a moment.

"A wrecked ship is easy to find—but a motor, no," agreed Kennard.

Rariden came around the corner. He never asked a question. One look at us was enough.

"Gone!" he said in that vibrating voice which was deeper than bass. He sat down, and stared moodily into the distance.

"A hell of a fine fella, boys," he said

half to himself. "Looked dumb but was smart. And all the rest of it. Why can't we find him, corpse or alive! That boy never even left the railroad, I don't believe! He was safe an' sane. Why ain't there a trace of 'im anywheres? Huh? Answer me that! If you knew him like I knew him—"

"If he flew along the railroad and came down we'd have found him!" Kennard stated flatly. "Perhaps we might miss him in the chaparral, but not along the rails!"

"And it's certain I am that that's where he flew!"

"But where is he then?" snapped Kennard.

"It has been known for a flyer to be lured down, and then forced to fly somebody somewhere," I suggested.

"Remember my little soirée, don't you?" inquired Sleepy Spears. He turned to Rariden and Daly.

"I was flying along on patrol and saw a body laying in a big field. Naturally, I came down. It was a girl. The field could be landed on, so I landed. Before I got through I found out that the girl had been planted there to get me down, so my ship could be used for a smuggling flight."

"It might be," Daly said quietly, "that there was another man in that bandit gang—the train robbers, I mean—who escaped us. He might have just hid out, done that same trick that Sleepy described, and forced Oley to fly him into Mexico."

"Sort of improbable, but possible," Kennard said. "In view of what Rariden said about Johannsen, it seems to me that it's either that—or that he's just a heap of charred bones out in the mesquite somewhere. Just to make sure, we'll search the railroad again tomorrow. The police all over Texas are making inquiries, too, so that if he got lost some where off our beat we'll know by tomorrow."

"He never left the railroad," Rariden insisted stubbornly, and his point seemed to me well taken.

RARIDEN left for town immediately, having a dinner engagement with some of the committee in charge of the benefit, and after he had left Daly remarked:

"Of course we must not leave out of consideration the fact that Rariden himself is still under suspicion, and that there may be more in this disappearance than meets the eye. He may know exactly where Oley is, and—"

"For what reason?" interrupted Kennard. "What purpose would there be in a disappearance?"

"None that I can figure out," Daly admitted. "I was just mentioning the possibilities."

"Possibilities," I informed the world at large as I uncoiled and got to my feet, "are rapidly driving me into a cuckoo condition than which there is no cuckooer. Von Sternberg, the circus, Oley, Rariden and the busted prop—if you find me playing with paper dolls, don't be surprised, anybody."

"They haven't succeeded in getting any of the train robbers to talk, have they?" Daly asked.

"Not that I've heard of," Kennard answered. "They're just keeping mum. The ship hasn't been traced yet, either, according to Sheriff Trowbridge. They're working to identify it and the men, of course."

"I'm anxious to see some newspapers," Tex MacDowell announced. "I'll bet that El Paso jail delivery'll arouse some comment."

"Won't affect international relations, though, much as Von Sternberg might like to see that little result," said Kennard. "Apparently the rescuers of the genial German were all non-Mexican."

"I'm waiting for a message from Graves," Daly told us. "I sure hope that I'm authorized to make a private trip into Mexico. This Von Sternberg is liable to start a whale of a fire along this river if his future lives up to the possibilities of his past."

Upon which profound thought I took myself a bit of a nap. I fell asleep trying

to analyze just what my feelings were regarding Buck Rariden. And for some reason, I was beginning to get a spreading hunch that perhaps that Irishman had depths, thoughts and activities which were somewhat in line with Daly's surmises.

Being an aged man, not as spry as I'd been in my youth, I felt the urge to sleep again before eleven o'clock rolled around that evening. Furthermore, I'd seen a telegram from the show, which was playing Gonzales that day, urging Rariden to return right away and give full details of the loss of a perfectly good ship and pilot. That made it seem very likely, according to Buck, that we'd be starting for the circus the next day. His activities in McMullen were meeting with such phenomenal success that his work was about done, anyhow.

The well known arms of Morpheus were enfolding my skinny frame so tightly that I took three dreams for myself, concerning octopi, being lassoed, and a wrestling match, before awakening to find out that they'd been caused by the hands of Jimmy Jennings, officer of the day, gripping my arms tightly. He had me sitting up in bed, and was shaking me madly.

"What the hell?" I sputtered stupidly.

"Get out of there and help me wake up the bunch!" shouted Jimmy, his face pale with excitement and his eyes like a cat's. "Hear that ship in the air? Well, there's one up there, and I just got a message from town that every last one of those train robbers have got out of their cells, escaped through a window after binding three guards, and have just started for the Border in a car armed with machine guns! It's El Paso over again!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROWN GUN SHIP

I FOUND myself outside the tent, pajama pants tucked into my boots and a leather coat above the pajamas. Jimmy was whooping down the row of tents, while I ran toward the hangars, where mechanics dressed for slumber were already wheeling two DH's out on the line. The river was six miles away. If we could get away in a minute or two we might catch that bandit car.

As I ran across the field, brightly illuminated by the landing lights, which had been switched on, the drone above me became a roar which shook the earth. A dark, squatty ship came swooping in from the north, coming low across the airdrome. My sleep drugged mind couldn't work fast enough then to even make a guess as to its purpose. I just stopped stock still as its wheels almost scraped the ground.

Then it zoomed upward, banking as it zoomed, until for a moment it hung on its side in the air.

"Good pilot," I told myself stupidly, and then I saw something large and white drop from the ship to the center of the airdrome.

A second later the strange ship had straightened out, and was scudding away from the airdrome, climbing. I reached the *billet-doux* in four gazelle-like leaps. Meanwhile I was thinking:

"They must have filed their way out of their cells. If so who delivered the tools to them?"

The package proved to be a sheet of paper tied around a sizable rock. The pilot had prepared his message well ahead of time, and it was brief and to the point.

> I have machine guns on this ship, and I'll shoot down any ship that tries to take off.

At that second the first Liberty roared into life, great streams of fire pouring from its exhaust pipes. Up in the darkness the other ship was circling watchfully. Across the field from the tents streamed the flyers.

I got to them, waving the note. The Liberty's bellow had died to a whisper as the warmup started.

"Nothing we can do!" I bawled to Kennard. "The whole thing was worked out by some one who knew exactly what would happen. That ship up there has got guns, and we haven't a chance to get into the air!"

In the excitement there was no disposition to analyze matters in detail; that could come later. I remember Daly, as composed as if he were sitting in a theater during the intermission. But I knew that beneath that unexcited exterior his brain was working a mile a minute.

I was striving desperately to think of some way to do something. Without consciously figuring the thing through, I was aware of a feeling that a lot of things were connected up now. This gang had friends in Mexico—so had Von Sternberg—the ship above meant two airplanes used for banditry in the last four days.

"We can't get the fleeing prisoners, but maybe we can nab that flyer and get something out of him."

Daly's cool voice cut through the hubbub, and everybody stopped talking. He had to raise his voice as the outlaw ship came lower, warning us not to use that warming DeHaviland.

In a second his idea had penetrated our skulls. Too long an interval had passed to leave even a remote possibility of recapturing the fugitives—but the flyer above us, if caught, would supply a key to the situation.

"Turn out the landing lights!" bawled Kennard. "Get those four spare Lewises! Idle that ship, Clancy, as low as you can. Start the other one!"

Darkness blotted out the airdrome. There was no moon, but the stars hung low in the sky and supplied the suspicion of light. Minute after minute passed, while shadowy figures, bearing their burdens, placed themselves around the airdrome. The sentinel ship was higher now.

"I hope to God he can't see too much," Daly almost prayed.

"That's my ship they're warming—I'm elected!" I announced, and the fact that it was my own boat which was going to be used enabled me to out-argue Dumpy Scarth, Tex MacDowell and Sleepy Spears. They were all dying for action and would have given their shirts to be in the air. George Hickman was elected my observer—if there should be need for us to fly.

Everything was ready. I had been afraid that the strange plane would leave before preparations were complete. That automobile must be close to the river now, and his job was almost done.

One DeHaviland was pointing up the field, toward the fence which bounded the northern rim of the airdrome. Kennard himself shoved the throttle part way on. The landing lights flooded the field again as the pilotless ship, with a hastily constructed dummy in it, bumped slowly over the sand as if taxiing into position for a takeoff.

In a second the aerial watchman above us was on his way down. He streaked earthward like a rocket, his exhaust pipes leaving twin lines of fire behind him. We held our collective breath.

"She's going straight!" breathed MacDowell.

The attacking plane was coming in from the west, pointed toward us, on the eastern edge of the field. It's nose was headed for the Army plane, bouncing slowly along the ground.

"Good God—shoot!" bellowed Kennard. He must have bellowed, because I was fully two feet away from him and I could hear his shrill squawk above the devilish clatter of the speeding plane.

Buck Rariden was flat on his stomach, and the next second Kennard and I and the rest were in the same position. The outlaw ship was a hundred feet high, angled downward at the decoy DeHaviland and coming along at two hundred miles an hour if it was making an inch.

Every man on that airdrome, I realized suddenly, was facing annihilation the next moment if anything went wrong.

"God, that Daly is a cold blooded proposition!" I groaned.

He was taking as much of a chance as anybody, but—

RED SPOTS pricked out against the black nose of the speeding ship as its machine guns started their rattle of death. And at the same moment, from four double Lewises spotted on

the eastern and western edges of the airdrome, in the shade of hangars, the answering fire came. Four observers who'd handled back seat guns for their lives in France were behind those guns.

A split second would tell the tale, and it did. Just as the empty DeHaviland collided with the fence and its propeller smashed, some gun, or guns, found the range of the ship which had been lured into reach of the Lewises. The roar of the motor became a broken rhythm. The ship seemed to be thrown half on its side and to wobble upward instead of making a clean zoom.

"Th' boys got him!" bellowed Buck Rariden.

The bandit craft recovered. Was the pilot hurt? The machine guns were still, now—the ship had zoomed out of range. With the remnants of its terrific excess speed it shot across the hangars and out of sight, two hundred feet from the ground. Its motor was coughing and spitting, but it was in the air and limping south.

"Come on, George!" I shouted, and the big blond observer was in the back seat of the DeHaviland before I had found my cockpit.

"Tough luck!" he bellowed as I strapped my belt. "Who'd have thought his propeller wouldn't be winged!"

I took one quick glance at the instruments. Oil pressure, air pressure, battery charging rate and the temperature seemed to leap out at me from the dials as I shoved the throttle all the way on and pushed the stick forward.

We were taking off the short way of the field, but I made it. We fairly climbed up the sides of the hangars on the western edge of the airdrome. Hickman was gripping my shoulder, leaning forward to yell in my ear:

"East, he is! Still in the air, but going slow."

I got the DH around, and picked up the red spots made by our quarry's exhausts. He was more than a mile ahead of us. I settled down in the cockpit and tried to shove the throttle even farther ahead. The tachometer read seventeen hundred revolutions a minute, and the air-speed meter a hundred and twenty miles an hour as we flashed toward the Rio Grande.

The other ship was coming down, gradually. It was in a shallow dive, which, together with what power the crippled motor had left, was sufficient to give it a speed almost equal to our own. It looked as if the pilot might make Mexico before he had to land and before we could catch up with him.

A half mile from the river I was a quarter of a mile behind him. He was very close to the ground. The first touches of dawn were visible in the east, and in a few moments we'd have some light to go by.

Now I was diving too, the four hundred and fifty horsepower Liberty still wide open. We were doing three miles a minute as the DH rushed toward its prey.

"He's not a foot off the ground!" I told myself as he was going across the last field which lay between him and the Rio Grande. "Is he landing or trying to make it?"

I guess he was trying to nurse his ship across the narrow river. But he couldn't make it. I saw him come down, halfway across that field, but he was going too fast to make a safe landing.

"He'll go right on into the river!" Hickman bellowed in my ear.

But he didn't. He elected to ground loop. The ship turned to the right, very sharply because of its ground speed. One wing dug into the ground. The ship did a sort of cartwheel on its nose. It seemed to collapse into one quarter of its normal size. As we swooped across it, it was a compact heap of débris piled up on the ground, next to the under growth along the river.

I circled around it for five minutes as purple turned to gray in the east and a wan light crept over the earth. Not a movement rewarded my straining peepers. Evidently the pilot, unconscious or dead, was down there underneath the wreckage.

"It didn't catch fire, anyway," I said thankfully, and after a questioning look at George I started down for my landing.

NORTHWARD two more McMullen DeHavilands were rushing toward the scene. We came in low, hopping over the fence with the remnants of our flying speed. I set her down within fifty feet of the barrier, and stopped rolling the same distance from the tangled pile of linen and wire and wood which was massed against the brush.

Colts in our hands, George and I made our way toward it.

"Thank God it's getting light enough to see something," he breathed. "I hope he isn't dead."

"Remember that he may be playing possum," I warned Hickman. "He'd know that while we were in the air our guns would have him helpless. On the ground he has a chance."

I picked at the wreckage as if it were charged with electricity and I had been warned that a grizzly bear in a nervous condition was hiding in it. Not a sound or a movement.

George pulled the last bunch of torn fabric away.

"Well I'll be damned!" he stammered in an awestruck manner, and I just stood and stared.

There wasn't a sign of a human being in the wreck.

It took me about half a minute to crank up the old bean.

"The son of a gun wasn't hurt and, while we were still flying around in the dark, he crawled into these bushes, and probably swam under water across the river!" I suggested.

"Let's take a look on the ground and signal the boys in the air," George proposed.

We made our meaning clear to the ships, and they promptly started circling to spot the fugitive. If he were in Mexico, we might take a chance on forcing him back across the river with machine guns. I looked across the river, into the depths of the chaparral. It was very thick there, and there was a strip of undergrowth for twenty yards along the river tangled and almost opaque. We searched along our side of the river, but there was no trace of our unknown pilot.

The two ships in the air were searching methodically.

"He's either drowned in the river, or else he's found a hole to crawl into," I said disgustedly. "Damn it—say, George, take a look at this ship!"

It hit me all of a sudden, as I saw an undamaged section of the tail-surfaces. I dug out a wing tip, too, and looked at it. The motor came in for scrutiny next, and then I, with George's assistance, tried to turn myself into a paint specialist. The airplane was painted a dark khaki, unrelieved by any other color.

My eyes met the shining blue ones of the tow headed giant before me. His round, good humored face was a study.

"By all that's good and great," I said weakly, "I believe this is Oley Johannsen's ship!"

CHAPTER IX

DUKE DALY SPEAKS

AS A MATTER of fact, there was no more believing about it than there is about the difference between a piece of beefsteak and a creampuff. It was the circus ship, repainted.

We left the searching planes to their own devices and lighted for home. We found the boys up and around, sitting in conference in the captain's office. With them, snorting and puffing and breathing forth fire from his nostrils, was none other than Sheriff Bill Trowbridge, gray headed veteran of the Border. Buck Rariden, luckily, was not present at the moment.

I gave the news in a few short sentences. It had a flattering effect. I set fire to a cigaret, sat me down on the edge of the desk, and waited.

Daly, his eyes luminous, was the first to speak.

"Rariden mustn't know that," he said incisively. "The question is, does it mean that Oley Johannsen was captured, and his ship confiscated, or that he is a member of the gang?"

He answered his own question.

"It seems beyond the bounds of probability that he belonged to the outfit and simply flew down to join them. It is more probable that by some hook or crook he was kidnaped or killed and his ship taken. On the other hand, that means the coincidence of a flyer being somewhere between here and San Antone, a member of the outfit, Johnny on the on the spot to get a ship.

"Perhaps investigation of his past career will show something that will give us a lead. I am going on the basis that Oley himself was not flying it tonight, of course. Even were he a member of the gang, he wouldn't be flying tonight. A stranger might escape if the ship was knocked down. Oley couldn't, being known to us all."

"The said gang, of course, being Von Sternberg's," I said.

"It seems certain that it is," Daly nodded. In the first place," he went on, "aerial bandits aren't running wild around Mexico or the United States. In the second place, the mere fact that the gang had knowledge of the large shipment of money to the McMullen bank indicates a large and efficient organization. An airplane was used in that well planned operation, spoiled only by accident.

"In the third place, an airplane was used tonight, and the method of rescuing the bandits was about the same as was used in El Paso to salvage the chief himself.

"In the fourth place, the fact that these men had friends who were willing to go on such lengths to spring them out of jail means a smart and powerful outfit."

"As well as one which would be badly scared at the mere possibility that one of their number might talk," stated Kennard.

"The reason that no one took the opportunity to save himself by turning State's evidence may be that they were all sure they would be helped to make their escape," Tex suggested.

Daly nodded.

"This matter of the disappearance of Oley Johannsen," he ruminated, a queer look in his eyes. "Are you all in agreement with me? Think that there is no doubt that Oley fell into the hands of some member of the gang who was in this country, and that this man saw an opportunity to steal a ship for the cause?"

"No, I ain't!" came a loud and belligerent bellow, and Sheriff Bill Trowbridge, grand old warhorse of Hidalgo County, went into action under full steam.

THE LEONINE old man was pulling at his sweeping gray mustaches, his ordinarily kindly gray eyes now peering forth from the sun crinkles with a hard and cold light therein. He was a veritable giant, who in twenty years as a Texas Ranger and another twenty as a sheriff had learned to know Border badmen.

"I ain't sayin' you're wrong, Duke," he rumbled savagely, "but I ain't sayin' you're right by a hell of a sight. Who brung in that file that got one man out o' his cell, gave him a chanct to git the keys from a dumb guard, an' spring the rest of 'em so's they could git out to their friends? I give this Rariden and this Johannsen full privileges because they was with a couple o' you boys. Either one of 'em could 'a' slipped a file into a cell without no trouble."

"Furthermore," Kennard broke in, "the sheriff says that the only other people allowed in the jail to get a look at the prisoners were tried and true McMullenites who were personal friends, every one. If a file was smuggled in, it must have been by Rariden or Johannsen."

"Of course," roared Trowbridge, walking up and down the floor with a face that was like a thunderstorm in full operation, "I ain't sayin' that by some hook or crook, from bribery o' some deputy to jest an accidental oversight in searchin', it was absolutely impossible

that the file didn't get there by other means. But it's damn' improbable!"

"On the other hand," Daly said, "granting for the sake of argument that Johannsen—which would mean that it's almost a cinch Rariden was in on it too—was tied up with Von Sternberg, why would the whole outfit be so dumb as to have Johannsen disappear under mysterious circumstances, and then use his ship tonight? If it was knocked down it would inevitably be discovered—"

"Unless the pilot had orders to burn it if possible," I interrupted. "But as you say, their methods were dumb if Oley and Rariden are mixed up at all."

"To go further," Daly said, that peculiar light still in his eyes, "if they were accomplices, why wouldn't they help their comrades during that train robbery? They didn't have machine guns, true, but they had revolvers. They could have shot Slim's prop off before he ruined the holdup and made them all captives."

This little suggestion burst upon my gray matter with some force. The sheriff, whose pride had been hurt beyond repair, said nothing, but strode up and down the room with a tread that fairly shook the ramshackle building.

"Incidentally, we'd better not mention to Rariden that we've identified the ship," I said, changing the subject somewhat. "He'll know that we would be bound to be suspicious, and it would put him on his guard."

"I still feel," Kennard said slowly, "that there must be a strong doubt about Oley's ship reaching the Von Sternberg gang by being captured."

"And yet, if they were hard up for ships and wanted to steal a few, they'd be alert for an opportunity," Daly pointed out. "They have, or had, at least one man in this country, and if they're smugglers on the side, as you say, they'd have more—fences, and so forth. Johannsen merely ran into one, by accident or design, who could fly, and lost his ship."

"And either his life or his freedom," I said. "Otherwise we'd hear from him."

Daly looked around at us, and suddenly a mirthless smile flashed over his face.

"I see," he said calmly, "that in the back of all your minds is the thought that there is a strong likelihood of Oley and Rariden's being mixed up with the bandits. I've been arguing against it to draw you out and clarify my own mind. And I believe that there is a fifty-fifty chance that by some hook or crook they *are* spies, allies, or what you will, of Von Sternberg. If I could figure any logical reason for his wanting accomplices who are showmen, I'd be almost certain. In any event, Slim, you've got a job for yourself with the show: to verify or prove groundless our suspicions about Rariden, the remaining man we know. It does not necessarily follow that any one else in the show is mixed up in it. Rariden is the one to watch. I'll arrange for Federal men from San Antone to be around the show—as workmen, if possible, if not as supposed patrons who stay on the lot a great deal because they're interested—and you and they will have two objectives. One to find out whether Buck Rariden's old system of circus ethics still holds sway and there are plans afoot to rook the town of McMullen; the other to see whether Von Sternberg enters into the situation."

Pete Miller slid off the edge of a table and shook his head. His small mustache was growing smaller as he almost pulled it out by the roots.

"HERE come the ships," I said, walking to the door. "Maybe they'll have news. That pilot couldn't have got far away."

"If it should happen to be Oley, what a lot of figuring it would save!" Sleepy Spears said wistfully.

The two DeHavilands landed, and Penoch O'Reilly and Pop Cravath got out. A second later they were lifting from the rear cockpit of Cravath's ship a small, limp figure.

We streamed across the field. I saw Buck Rariden coming up the boardwalk between the tents, and he too broke into a run.

One look at the pilot was enough. He was dead, for one thing; and his dark, lean face was not that of Oley Johannsen.

"Picked up his body in the river stuck under some bushes," boomed Penoch O'Reilly. "He crawled into the river and tried to escape, but couldn't make it. Look at that hole in his side. One of the bullets got him pretty."

"Sure had guts," was the requiem of Jimmy Jennings.

Penoch planted himself, as usual, and his finger stabbed out at us. His square face, eyes fairly crackling with the spirit of him, danced from face to face.

"Have you ever heard of or seen a Von Sternberg man that didn't?" he demanded.

The answer was no.

The flyers, with the knowledge that that dead pilot had been flying Johannsen's ship, seemed to look at Rariden in a new light. I did myself. The gaunt Irishman, up to then, had been just the shadow of a criminal to me. If pinned down, I would have said that I didn't believe that propeller incident, or his past, or anything else had proved to my satisfaction that he was capable of murder.

Now, as the collection of mysterious happenings grew in size, I suddenly found myself shrinking from him, as from a thing unclean. I had a sudden helpless feeling. He was too good an actor, could carry off his nefarious propositions with entirely too great a quantity of *savoir faire* and nonchalance, not to mention competence.

"Of course," Penoch went on, his face grim and strained, "this whole business makes it a cinch about Fred's mob. I'd like to know who's running it for him—or ran it for him rather—while he was supposed to be sick in El Paso."

"I guess we'd better send you north on leave," I observed. "Now that he's back he'll probably start talking. Your spoiling that dirigible deal and helping put him in jail won't sit so well with him."

It was a strange tangent to the conversation, perhaps, standing around a corpse, but somehow it seemed all the more likely, at that moment, that Penoch, due to Von Sternberg's personal enmity, might soon be a corpse himself.

"I wouldn't leave!" flashed the indomitable little runt. "But I'll sure break my neck to get that guy if he ever shows up in person!"

"Maybe we can find out who this boy is, from fingerprints and suchlike," ruminated Sheriff Trowbridge. "How about using your ambulance to git him into town, Cap'n?"

"Sure," agreed the captain.

My eyes followed his to Rariden. The showman was standing over the corpse, looking down into the face in deep revery that might almost be sorrow.

"Don't think you know him, do you Buck?" I asked him suddenly, and he almost jumped.

"No, but I'm thinkin' that there's but one explanation o' Oley not bein' here. I've jist made up me mind, final like. He was a-flyin' up the railroad, and by some manner o' means he gits into the clutches o' somebody that is, or wants to be, a Von Sternberg man or else just wants t' git to Mexico quick and secret. He either makes Oley fly him down, or kills him and flies himself."

Now that I was far from sure of Rariden, I immediately thought:

"If Buck was in on the whole deal, knew that their ship was needed for tonight's work, and realized that there was a strong likelihood that we'd discover that the outlaw ship was Oley's, what would he do? He'd start explaining the ship's being used by the Von Sternberg man, which is what he's done!

"Well, me for breakfast," I said finally. "You are all cordially invited to a good wash in the bathhouse, to be followed by bacon and eggs in the north dining-room."

I WANDERED away, followed by Tex MacDowell and Daly.

"You'll have a great time with the show, I'll bet," Tex drawled plaintively, "and you may have to keep your eyes open for your own good. Buck, even if he hates the thought of you being around,

still couldn't refuse to let you go. But he might get you out of the way, temporarily."

"I wish I could go," Daly said.

I looked around, and instantly I realized what was on his mind. Again, in just a minor way, he was paying for the past. His very usefulness as Grave's assistant was lessened because of what he had been. His tiff with Rariden had forced him from cover. It was impossible for him to even ask to go with the show.

I didn't know just what to say. We were silent for a moment, then I blurted:

"Oh, hell, what do you care? You can't have everything. I'll admit I'm looking forward to it, and with your training you could discover a lot more, if there's anything to be discovered, than I could. You've done more than your share. You spotted Rariden as a suspicious character, didn't you? Your feud with him, in a manner of speaking, is responsible for our knowing anything!"

FOR SOME reason we all turned into Tex's tent. Furthermore, we had a drink. I lay my present good health to the fact that I never had a drink before I was eight years old, and even now never take one before nine o'clock in the morning, but this was a special occasion when I needed medicine.

"Duke," Tex said easily, "is probably one of the most valuable men the Government has—for the very reason that he's so familiar with all the rackets, and the underworld."

"And liable to be recognized whenever I go out on a job," Daly said quietly, his lips smiling but his eyes shadowed.

"Don't get one of those fits, you damn' fool!" Tex razzed him.

The Duke got up and shook himself. Then he took another drink. In breeches, boots and a white shirt, he looked like a stripling of twenty-three or four. The uncanniness of that youthful face with those age old eyes peeking forth from it was an eery thing.

"I know it," he said slowly. "Excuse me, Slim. I don't know you very well, but I don't mind. This whole thing has got me. Being here, in the first place. If there's one thing in this world I want to do and be, it's to fly and be a flying officer in the Army. I can't. Why? Because I was a professional gambler, and it's known just widely enough to make me blackballed as officer material."

Suddenly his iron control broke. There was thunder and lightning in his eyes, and his mouth seemed to be snarling savagely at God.

"I'm sick and tired of sneaking around, afraid that somebody will expose me, knowing all the time that the people I'm with would be casting sidelong looks at me and hiding their silver if they knew what I'd been! I wouldn't give a damn—don't give a damn—for them personally. I can live happily without anybody! But the hypocrisy of it gets me and, crook that I was, I could sincerely spit on fifty per cent. of the people who'd draw their skirts away from me!"

I could scarcely believe my ears and eyes. Now I realized what a terrific ordeal the man had been through during those days, and what iron it had taken to walk through his part so scornfully. A shell of indifference had been built around him—but it didn't go deep.

"That may go with a lot of people," I said, "but it doesn't go with this mob, Duke."

Suddenly he was himself again. He smiled that repressed little smile, his eyes warm and friendly.

"I know that. With you two, anyway. And I'm cuckoo. I've brooded so much I've got ingrowing of the introspection, so to speak. Every once in a while it gripes me, though. I feel as if every soul that looked at me even here was thinking and wondering just how fundamentally crooked I am. And when you add to that the feeling that I'm handicapped, as now, on a job, it sort of cuts me out of everything."

We forgot breakfast, and when we finally did get there we were alone. For two or three hours the three of us just discussed things, one way and another,

and the Duke, for the second time in his life, I think, let himself go. Bit by bit I got the story. And the bitterness and loneliness and hardship of his boyhood became clearer and clearer to me, until, when the incident of his being picked up, starving, in an Oklahoma saloon and made a gambler took its proper place I said to myself—

"Hell, I'd have committed murder then for a thousand dollars or a pair of shoes!"

And here's another funny thing. I don't know why I felt that way, exactly. I've met my share of the great of the earth. Why should I feel honored to have been admitted under the shell of Duke Daly? Why should his willingness to make me his third real friend seem like one of the greatest compliments I'd ever received?

Search me, unless it's because a man who's raised himself by his bootstraps deserves the respect of anybody. And for a man to be an exception to any rule indicates something exceptional in him, good or bad.

Besides, I found myself liking the Duke.

CHAPTER X

THE BIG SHOW

HAD YOU been in a stuffy railroad coach, the day following my little before breakfast exercises with an unknown pilot in Oley Johannsen's ship, you would have observed, in two seats which faced each other, a pair of remarkable looking men. One, meaning me, had his legs parked on the seat opposite, his collar open at the neck, and a handkerchief ready to wipe off his face before the perspiration got out of control.

The other one, Mr. Buck Rariden, had no coat on at all, although he had made a concession to convention by carrying it. His vest swung open; his long, freckled face was facing the window, and above it his hat sat on the extreme posterior portion of his dome. His sandy hair was tangled, and his brooding eyes were resting absently on the scenery which flashed by at fully twenty miles an hour.

We had flown as far as Donovan Field and were now entrained, at four o'clock in the afternoon, for the town of Hondura, where the circus was showing that day. The following morning it would be in San Antonio for a two-day weekend stand, thence a Sunday jump to McMullen, and Monday was the day of days.

We hadn't talked much. I had considerable to think of, both before and behind me. So far as was possible, all the machinery was in operation. Buck and Oley were being investigated, as was the season's history of the Barr-Maxwell show. The Government of the United States, somewhat secretly, was hinting to the powers that be in Mexico that one Von Sternberg, nesting in their midst, was raising hell to a very high level along the Border and that it would be a great relief to this Government if his activities were curtailed by the gendarmes. Sheriff Trowbridge, rumbling and swearing and biting ferociously at his mustaches, was making secret preparations to police McMullen as it had never been policed before during the big shindig on Monday. Fingerprints and a description of the unknown pilot had been broadcast, and from San Francisco to Mexico City the forces of the law were supposed to be looking earnestly for one Oley Johannsen. That he was in Mexico, if alive, seemed a lead pipe cinch, but we were overlooking no bets.

"What's the matter, Buck?" I said finally. "Your face is not its beaming self, so to speak. No one would think you'd put across a big deal in McMullen."

"Say, I got that there town by the tail, didn't I?" he flashed back, and for a moment the old sparkle was in his eyes.

"Of course, losing Oley isn't so pleasant—"

"You're damn' roight it ain't—and the Old Man seems to have went nuts about it."

"Barr, you mean?" I asked him. "Say, why does the owner travel with the show?"

"He ain't but a quarter owner. He'

an old showman, likes the atmosphere I guess. I got the title o' manager, but I rate about assistant. He's the big cheese."

"And he's all worked up over Oley, eh?" I asked.

That interested me, if true. If he really was excited about it, it meant that one Mr. Barr wasn't in on Oley's deal, if any. That is, if Oley had deliberately deserted, Barr knew no reason for it. Which meant that a tieup with Von Sternberg was not a circus matter, but an individual idea.

"Is he? Won't I git raked over the coals!"

"It wasn't your fault."

"That won't make no difference."

I almost laughed aloud at the thought of Buck Rariden being scared at the prospect of meeting his boss.

HE RELAPSED into thought for a moment. Then, out of a clear sky, he said—

"I hear that Duke Daly is workin' fur the Government now."

He was scrutinizing me closely as he said that. I lied.

"Not that I know of—now. When he was with the Border Patrol, of course—

"What a laugh that'd be!" Rariden fairly spat.

"You don't like him, do you?"

"Not by a damn' sight, I don't! Him runnin' around tryin' t' git a fellow in bad—"

"He didn't, Buck! He tried to keep from even recognizing you! You forced it on yourself, and—"

"Oh, the simple fool!" Rariden growled with sublime disregard for logic or the facts. "And I know what he's worked up to. Don't think Buck Rariden's any fool. I could see when I was talkin' to them fellers in McMullen that they knowed somethin', and wasn't trustin' me all the way. Same with you fellers. Not you, but some of 'em. Tryin' t' go straight does a hell of a lot o' good with somebody always around t' knock ye down."

His eyes were searching mine as he gave vent to these thoughts. I felt certain that he was trying to pump me.

"Don't git me wrong, Slim," he said finally. "I loike ye, and ye're my kind. Not a upstage dummy like Daly. And mark ye this. Some men go wrong without goin' wrong inside, get me? Others is cold fish that's born crooked and cold and can't niver change. That's Daly."

"Maybe so," I said, to draw him on, "but what were you going to say?"

"This. I figure you're here just t' keep track o' me and look over the show because o' what Daly said. I don't give a damn. You're welcome to look all ye damn' please."

"Don't be silly!" I advised him, while I thought:

"Licked before I start! He's got everything figured out, and if there is anything sour about the show I'll never find it out!"

"I wouldn't blame ye," Rariden went on, "in view o' the circumstances. I ain't holdin' it agin ye. I'd do the same meself!"

"Why do you hate Daly so much?"

"Ah, he's such a conceited, fishy crook that thinks he's the king o' all creation, too good fur us roughnecks!"

That, I decided instantly, was what lay at the bottom of the Irishman's vast antipathy for Daly as a personality. In birth and breeding and mental outlook he was not as the average men he had associated with during his underworld days, and their consciousness of vague inferiority made him distrusted, disliked and uneasily respected.

"Well, here we are!" quoth Rariden as the train slowed to a stop. "I'll bet the Old Man is at the station!"

He wasn't, but a Western Union boy was, with a telegram for me. It was from McMullen, and it read:

TELEPHONE IMMEDIATELY

—KENNARD

"I've got to make a phone call," I told Buck. "Can you wait a minute?"

"Sure. See that little truck over there? The show's name's on it. That's for us. I'll wait ye there."

Again that speculative look was in those blue eyes of his. He was wondering about that telegram. I cursed, mentally, with venom and fluency as I made for the phone booth. I would be about as useful around that circus as a drink of water would be to a drowning man.

It didn't take long to get McMullen, and soon Kennard's voice came over the wires.

"Don't ask questions," he barked. "We've found out that the file used in that jail break came from the crew's shop. That makes it a certainty that Oley Johannsen or Rariden smuggled in a file to one of those bandits. Also, it's a cinch that Oley deliberately flew his ship back into Mexico and joined Von Sternberg. Got it? Be on your guard, of course. What we now know makes it equally sure that they shot you and Daly down when that prop broke. So watch your step."

"O.K!" I answered dazedly. "Now listen to this. Buck is wise, and what good I can do I don't know."

I told him, briefly, of our conversation.

"Stick around awhile, anyway," ordered Kennard. "Watch out for accidents. They can't murder you openly of course."

I joined the brooding Rariden.

OLEY was now convicted. Rariden must be considered equally guilty, on the strength of Oley's proven criminality. Rariden had just indicated that he knew Daly was working for the Government. That made the attempted killing of Daly and me more reasonable to believe. Rariden, of course, was in on that.

"Just telling me to be prepared to hustle back to McMullen if I should get a wire," I lied. "They have a tip which may keep us busy, down the Border. Looks as though I might not have much of a vacation."

Rariden grunted. He did not indicate that he felt relieved. No more was said as we sped through the streets of the little town. I could sense the holiday atmosphere, which the circus always brings to a small town and, as we neared the lot, streams of people sort of coagulated, bound for the show. It was only five-thirty, but they were on their way.

We got off in front of the midway, which held a respectable number of customers already. A sideshow barker was at work, and the tenders of refreshment stands were howling their wares.

"We'll chow first," Buck told me.

As we walked down the midway, turned past the sideshow tent that faced it and made our way to the cook tent, I noticed several things. The strongest impression I received was of the dinginess of the show. The big top and the menagerie top, alongside it, were dirty and looked worn and discouraged. The pennants were discolored. The two ticket takers on the sideshow were badly in need of shaves, and the barker seemed slightly stewed. There was a general "down at the heel" atmosphere about, all the more depressing because the show was a big one.

The cook tent was about a hundred yards back of the midway line, and as we entered it Buck greeted the steward absently and said to me:

"We'll eat on the stag end. The left side is fur men and women both—kinkers, executives and women. We'll eat with the bosses."

Which we did. I knew from Penoch that the heads of all departments in a circus were bosses on the lot, although they were "superintendents" in cold type. I was introduced to a dozen tanned, hard bitten old-timers at our table: Boss elephant man, boss hostler, boss blacksmith, boss animal man, boss canvasman, sideshow boss, and the rest. The next table to ours was occupied by assistant bosses. The group at the various boards ranged down the social scale to the negro canvasmen, eating in the rear of the big tent.

The food was plain, plentiful and good. Buck seemed popular, and the question on every one's lips was about Oley, first, and about prospects in McMullen, second. The boss hostler, a dried up little old man with a million wrinkles in his face, said finally:

"This show sure needs a break. McMullen better pan out, or the Old Man'll be crazy! He's a wild man now."

The entire tent looked at me with great curiosity, and after the bosses, who had started eating before we had, had left I asked Buck—

"They don't know why I'm here, or even that I was coming, do they?"

He shook his head.

"I didn't say nothin' about it," he told me.

He certainly was downcast. I just couldn't believe that his patent worry could be laid entirely to his dread of meeting his boss. Why should he dread it? Certainly not because Oley was lost. He'd done a good job for the show in McMullen. Could it be because he had been literally compelled to drag me along as a guest?

"Well, let's see Jim," Rariden said suddenly. "The tent'll be down on our heads if we don't."

Which was the truth. Already the great steam wagon had been unhooked and the kitchen, in the rear of the cook tent, was practically dismantled. Canvasmen were at work on the guy ropes of the main structure.

"She'll be packed and on the train in three-quarters of an hour," Buck told me as we walked out. "See that tent way over back o' the padroom comin' down? That's the horse tent."

"According to Penoch O'Reilly," I said, "they even tear the menagerie down before the show's half over."

"Sure. By the time the show's over there ain't nothin' left but the big top and the back yard."

"What's the back yard?" I inquired.

"That canvas wall around the back o' the big top. See them small tents inside it? Them's the wardrobe top, the ballet top, the padroom, and so forth. I guess we'll find Jim at the stob wagon."

"Is that what Penoch O'Reilly calls the stake and chain wagon?"

"Sure. The stake and chain man keeps soap, water, towels and such like fur the bosses. Easy chairs, too. That's headquarters fur the bosses. Stake and chain man's a good job around a show, even these days. Tips every week."

DUSK had fallen, and the electric lights along the midway flared into life. As we walked down the slight slope, toward it, the crowd looked larger. Balloon men, banner men, badge men and the like were hawking their wares loudly. The big top was alight, too, and the sideshow band was blaring lustily. The fat woman came out of the rear of the tent to get a breath of fresh air, followed by the tattooed man. All around the big top canvasmen were tightening ropes against the evening dew, and a hundred yards back of the padroom more than a hundred gray horses, shelterless now, loomed against the darkness like oversized sheep. The crowds were streaming into the midway, and the lot was taking on life and color and romance for me.

"Here's Jim!" Rariden said suddenly.

For the first time, as I saw a vague, bulky figure hurrying toward us around a huge pole wagon, the position I was in swept over me. Probably the darkness, and the strangeness of my surroundings, had something to do with it. The big Irishman next to me was a canny, crafty, cold blooded criminal. The show, perhaps, held within it a dozen outlaws, or even more, and there was something sinister about it. What hopes and plans were hidden in its six hundred people? Oley Johannsen had shown his colors. Did Friederich Von Sternberg, hiding in the remote depths of Mexico, have a hand in the Barr-Maxwell Circus?

"And just where does Slimuel X. Evans, known spy, stand around this joint?" I asked myself, and got no answer.

The possibilities in the situation swept over me. I could feel my heart pounding faster, and suddenly life seemed very succulent and sweet as I mentally started peering in all directions, alert for trouble. I felt as if every shadow held a clue.

"Where the hell you been?" bellowed Mr. James Barr from a distance of forty feet.

"Thought we'd chow before they tore down," barked Rariden. "Well, boss, we done a good job in McMullen and she looks set fur a thirty thousand dollar day at the least."

"Damn' near enough to pay fur that ship!" sneered Barr.

As he came toward us with short, choppy strides I got a good look at him. He was about medium height, coming almost to my chest, but he was so broad he looked short; and fat, although his weight gave the impression, rather, of hard flesh. His face was a full moon, and there were dozens of deep, overhanging wrinkles in it. His eyes were encased in flesh, making them look small. They were bloodshot, too, as if from lack of sleep, and his brow was corrugated in deep, apparently permanent wrinkles.

"Jim, this here's Lieutenant Slim Evans, of McMullen. He's gonna be the guest o' the show fur a few days after helpin' us out tremendous down there."

"The hell you say!" exploded Mr. Barr, his voice breaking nervously.

As he removed his cigar I noted that his hand was trembling. His face became almost purple, and he seemed to be trying to get a few apoplectic words loose, without much success.

Some of his wrath appeared to evaporate by the time he could talk.

"This ain't personal, Lieutenant," he growled venomously. "I don't know you from Adam. What the hell d'you mean, Buck, bringin' in outsiders when the show's already too big to handle?"

"He can sleep with me!"

"The hell he can! You got somebody in with you now. You got no business doin' that—"

"The hell I ain't!" blazed Rariden. "These flyers helped this show out in McMullen, and you, ye fool, can't see that treatin' 'em this way—"

"Pipe down, pipe down! Who's runnin' this show?"

He turned toward me, his pig eyes glittering with wrath.

"Excuse me, Lieutenant, but we ain't got a spot fur you, and there ain't no way we can carry you. Stick around durin' the day, but we can't carry you at night."

He whirled on Rariden.

"What happened to Oley Johannsen, and tell me the truth, you red headed mick!"

His straw hat was over one eye, now, looking like a saucer on the head of an elephant. If ever I saw a man who was literally twitching with nervousness, it was Barr.

"I told ye!" blazed Rariden, his face red and his huge fingers writhing significantly.

WHILE Rariden repeated the story of the disappearance of Oley, as he knew it or pretended to know it, I was thinking:

"This bird Barr wasn't in on Oley's trip to join Von Sternberg. That means that the show itself isn't working with Von Sternberg. I'll bet that Buck Rariden was afraid—"

"Well, I don't believe it," blared Barr. "In my opinion, that flat faced, square headed, yellow bellied snake is a damn' crook, and stole the ship!"

His eyes seemed to be boring into Rariden's, seeking for information there.

"The old boy called the turn, and he believes Buck was in on it and Buck was afraid that that's just what he'd think!" I told myself jubilantly.

"Can't believe it!" Rariden said positively. "Chief, airplanes ain't no wheelbarrows! Sure an' Oley's layin' out in the mesquite somewheres. Didn't I tell ye when we bought it that a missin' cylinder at the wrong time meant a total loss? It was a good idee, for advertisin' and droppin' circulars and passenger carryin', but I told ye what the risk was and you got no call to beef if you lose now!"

The trembling old showman lighted a new cigar, and the flame he tried to hold to its tip almost burned off both of his ears before he got the range.

"Well, I bought me another ship. Joins in San Antone, with a pilot. Cheap Jenny—"

"Goin' crazy?" Rariden asked tactfully. "Only another month t' go, show practically broke, and you layin' out money—"

"It's my money, ain't it?" bawled Barr. "What about McMullen, now? Come on over to the stob wagon where I can sit down."

He led the way around the big top, just outside the ropes. As we walked he and Rariden were in earnest conversation, and I was reflecting:

"Didn't take him long to buy another ship. He must be desperate. I don't see why an advertising airplane is so important."

We planted ourselves under a canvas canopy attached to the side of the stake and chain wagon. I listened in on the chatter of Barr and Rariden, but there was nothing important in it save for the fact that every time Oley's name was mentioned Barr went into a series of the most awe inspiring and original cussing that has ever made these flapping ears tingle. He never repeated an epithet, and at last I thought to myself:

"He couldn't hate Oley more if he knew the truth. He's sure positive for one that's just guessing."

The candy butchers, ushers and ticket men were getting their uniform coats on in a small tent next to the stob wagon. Most of them were youngsters—not more than twenty-two or three. I was listening closely to Rariden and Barr. The owner certainly did want to know all the details about McMullen, from the number of blocks on the main street to the number of members of the well known Rotary club. I was wondering whether Buck would mention Duke Daly, but he did not.

"It looks to be a cinch that Rariden and Barr aren't exactly brothers in any company," I reflected. "If there's crooked work afoot, when the show hits McMullen, it looks as though the show as a whole wasn't in on it. I guess Rariden and Oley alone, have something up their sleeves. Maybe to steal some money and fly over the Border. In that case, though . . ."

"FOR THE love o' Mike! Slimy McRae!"

It was an exclamation from Buck, given birth to by the appearance of an emaciated, leathery faced man of forty or so with squinty eyes and a shuffling walk. He disappeared into the tent and emerged in about three seconds with a uniform coat on and a cap with its peak extending low over his eyes. He was old enough to be the father of the other men who dressed there.

"What is that grifter doin' around this show?" demanded Rariden.

"He was broke and showed up, so I give him a job. Candy butcher."

"I'll watch my pants while he's around," grunted Rariden. "Them ain't no kind to have around this outfit, Jim. It's them guys—"

"Pull in your neck!" bawled Barr furiously. "He ain't sellin' tickets, is he, or where he can do any harm?"

"No," Rariden said doggedly, "maybe he ain't—but what does he do after hours? Crack a spare safe, maybe, huh? Just ain't the right thing."

"Mind your own business, and if you don't like it git out!" yelled Barr.

He certainly was a nervous individual. Entirely too nervous over the theft of an eighteen thousand dollar ship. That's a wad of dough, but any man who owns an airplane and doesn't figure on the possibility of its quick demise at any given moment, is balmy in the bean.

Rariden, for a moment, looked as if he were going to tear his boss limb from limb.

"Damned if I wouldn't be glad to git off this show!" he replied furiously. "What's the matter with you? You're worse'n any old woman I ever seen. It's makin' a spectacle of yourself ye are, and I'm tellin' you whether ye like it or not!"

That tirade, surprisingly, seemed to slow the Old Man down.

"Oh, shut up!" he said weakly. "Now about that McMullen lot—" and they were off again.

Naturally, with my purpose with the show known by Rariden, he would have

said nothing incriminating in my presence anyway. However, neither he nor Barr showed any inclination for private conversation. I thought I had the lay pretty well figured out—a plot of some kind as between Sternberg, Oley and Rariden—but somehow I couldn't be certain of my opinions. There were a dozen little things which indicated opposite possibilities to me.

Suddenly the band blared forth in the big top, starting the before the show concert. From the midway, hidden by the tents, there came a ceaseless hum. The cries of ticket takers and barkers cut through it incessantly.

"Step right up! Hurry along, folks, hurry along. Show starting inside! This way to the big show!"

One bull-like voice, keeping up this ceaseless chant, far outshone the strained efforts of the sideshow spieler.

"Will, I'd better git goin' if ye've got everything straight," quoth Mr. Rariden. "Come on, Slim, and take a look."

We looked, finally ending up in the thronged back yard where the grand opening spectacle was being formed. The square of grass surrounded by wagons, small tents and the canvas wall, was a maze of gaudily dressed men and women, elephants, horses and what have you. There were two groups, one to enter through the connection between menagerie tent and big top and the other aimed at the big top entrance itself. Dozens of canvasmen, both white and colored, were made up as everything from Roman Legionnaires to Zulus.

"Every thing except the hot dog men go in this," remarked Rariden.

He prowled around, through the big top, out around the wagons where horses were already being hooked up preparatory to getting equipment to the trains as fast as it was used, and finally he seemed to be looking fixedly into the faces of many of the made up laborers in the back yard. Every once in a while he grunted. He absently returned the greetings thrown at him. Three times I saw him stop, his finger shaking under some man's nose, and apparently ask him what he was doing around the show.

AS THE performance went on Rariden scowled more and more, and he was as talkative as a sick oyster. I stayed out around the menagerie tent, watching it being torn down. As fast as the animal troupes got through, their cages were drawn out, and the top was coming down before the lions had even appeared in the arena. They returned from their Thespian endeavors to cages which were out in the open air, and the elephants were standing in a long line, unshielded from non-paying eyes.

A stout and bearded individual known at Studebaker Slim, assistant to the boss canvassman, was nominally in charge of the teardown, but Buck took it over. Apparently he wanted to ease his steadily rising wrath against the world in general. He bellowed and swore and coaxed and bullied until he had close to a hundred canvasmen making speed records. The assistant bosses followed suit, and the teardown became a frenzied thing. I'd never seen Buck in action, and it was entertaining. He had a voice which, when opened up, made Penoch O'Reilly's voice a whisper. He could have stood on a street corner in Chicago, gone into full voice, and won the hog calling championship of Arkansas.

But the little matter of the menagerie top, apparently, was only a prelude. Buck had plank wagons driving into the big top almost before the show was over. Four gangs, working under four assistant bosses, were tearing down the seats like mad as Buck's voice reverberated against the roof. I saw him knock a loafer down and threaten another one. In what seemed to me about fifteen minutes the huge top was as empty as the railroad station in Sauk Center is at four o'clock in the morning. Now they were at quarter poles, dragging them down, and soon there after I was up by the light wagons, watching the big top come down in the light of the great searchlights which swept the lot. The four center poles

stood gaunt and useless, while hundreds of men, like ants, swarmed over the billowing canvas and started unlacing it into sections and rolling it up. It was a scene of industry, of work done with dizzying speed, and somehow, as I surveyed it, the lure of the circus was stronger within me than it had ever been in boyhood days.

Buck Rariden dominated that lot. To me it seemed that he, single handed, was responsible for the steady stream of wagons, drawn by superb baggage stock, which trundled out of the field and on down to the runs, the route marked by flaring torches set on street corners. Ringing the great lot were hundreds of people, watching. It was Buck Rariden at his job, loving it, doing it well.

THE CANVAS was being rolled into great sausages and pulled into the canvas wagons by teams of horses. Around the edges of the lot stake pullers were at work. The job was almost done, and Buck, his eyes snapping, joined me at the light wagon. His mouth was thin and twisted, and his eyes boded no good as he said surlily:

"Stick around, me boy, and within five minutes ye'll see the fight o' your life!"

"Huh?" I grunted.

"The very same," Buck went on, licking his chops in dour anticipation. His face was dark and savage. "Likewise, ye'll see Buck Rariden fired off the Barr-Maxwell show right now!"

"How come?" I asked him in a degree of astonishment which was by no means assumed.

"Because," he said, his voice grating, "I'm gonna tell the Old Man what I think o' him and his show both!"

"Listen, don't let him get on your nerves and do something foolish. As far as I'm concerned, if there isn't room it's all right with me."

"It ain't that! But he's shoved into this show, all of a suddin, fifteen or twenty o' the crookedest grifters that ever followed a strong carnival! I'll be damned if he ain't got a convention o' hustlers from three shell men to parade workers! And I— Listen, Slim."

His eyes were staring into mine, and his finger was tapping against my chest.

"Daly, damn 'im, picks me out as a jailbird, does he? And gits everybody watchin' me, does he? Buck Rariden ain't on the square, huh? Well, ye're gonna see now, and soon, whether he is or not. Since I got wise t' myself I'm off that stuff like a dirty shirt, and likewise it don't pay! And I'm leavin' this show fur one reason—because the Old Man is gittin' short changers and grifters in here, and aims to work *strong*. Go back to McMullen and tell the Prince o' Wales thot!"

Suddenly it seemed to me that about two thousand assorted and unrelated things clicked into place in my mind, forming a complete picture. A million ideas shot in and out as I stared over the busy lot, seeing nothing. Two things stood out in the welter of speculation within me. One was that Buck Rariden's pride had been hurt and hurt badly because the past was being held against him. The other was that the freckle faced, long nosed, loose tongued Irishman before me fairly radiated utter sincerity.

THERE and then I decided on something which only Slim X. Evans would be dumb enough to risk. If I should be sent to Europe as a diplomat every nation on earth would be at war with every other one within a week. Figuratively speaking, I put my wad on the table, rolled up my sleeves, spat on my hands, and prepared to bet even money that I could throw seven eight times in succession. I was taking a desperate chance, on instinct alone.

But I was sure of my ground—for the moment, that is. What doubts I went through later are nobody's business.

"Come here, Buck Rariden!" I ordered, and led him back into the darkness.

"You say Barr has charged this show with crooks since you've been gone?"

"Absolutely! I recognized fifteen old grifters meself! Lord knows how many more."

"What's his reputation?"

"In the old days, as smart and dishonest a showman as ever walked. Lately, good, like all of 'em. Mainly because they had to be."

"He's had a tough season, and is trying to rake in the dough by every means, then—and doubtless McMullen he figures as a bonanza, eh?"

"Looks so to me. What ye gettin' at? Gonna crab the deal?"

"Listen, Buck," I interrupted him, and the excitement was rising high within me. "Before I say a word, let me tell you this. I'm here because we have reason to suspect that monkey business is afoot in connection with the big day at McMullen. To be perfectly frank, we figured you as one of the ringleaders. What I'm saying is this. I don't think you are, now. But whether you are or not, this show is being and will be shadowed efficiently by Government men. If you're guilty, which I don't believe you are, you can do nothing so good for yourself as to throw in with me, anyhow. If you aren't one of the thugs, you'll want to help us out. You're sunk right now if there's dirty work at the crossroads. You couldn't get away."

I was lying, of course, because the Federal men wouldn't be at work until the next day, at San Antone. But I had sense enough to try to bluff him, if crooked, into becoming my ally.

His face was a study. He looked as if he couldn't make up his mind whether to kill me where I stood or merely call me a fool.

"Now listen," I said quickly, as he started to say something. "In the first place, we know Oley Johannsen is not on the level. We know absolutely that he deliberately stole that ship and flew down into Mexico and joined up with Von Sternberg."

For a moment Buck stood speechless. Then he bowled me over by saying slowly—

"I was afraid o' that every minute since he disappeared."

"You weren't in on it at all?"

"Hell, no! If it wasn't you that said that I'd break every bone—"

"All right. Calm down. Then your worry about him is what made you feel so peculiar the last few days, eh?"

"Sure. I dunno why I felt that, exactly—Oley's been a good feller as far as I know. But—"

"All right. Another thing. Duke Daly and I were sure that that prop breaking—"

"Begad, I wasn't gonna mention that, but that was what got me startin' t' think and wonder about Oley. He was in the back seat. I couldn't be sure, but Slim, I had a feelin' that I seen, out o' the corner o' my eye or the back o' my head, Oley puttin' a gun away. He could 'a' shot from behind me like that—I'd never heard it or knowed about it—and mebbe he did. Or mebbe it's just a dream I had. I couldn't be sure. But it seemed so cuckoo—he'd have no motive—that I dismissed it as crazy and said nothin'."

"I believe you. And I believe I have his motive. In view of what you've told me, I think the situation may be this."

"Wait a minute. You're sure ye believe what I'm tellin' ye?" He asked me, his eyes searching mine with a mixture of belligerence and childlike pleading. "The gun stuff was ridic'lous, and I couldn't say nothin'. But it was just enough t' make me wonder, when he disappeared that mysterious like, if maybe—"

"Sure I believe you." And I did.

FOR A few seconds we fell silent while I underwent his inspection. The lot was being cleared with miraculous speed. The canvas was stowed away, wagons were rumbling about, and the army of workers was melting toward the train. The center poles were carried, on dozens of shoulders, to a huge pole wagon drawn by eight horses. The shouts of the bosses were less frequent, now, and some of the wild drive in them had disappeared. The spectators were leaving, too, and within five minutes a naked lot would give no indication of the city of people and tons of equipment

which had made it a mecca that day.

"Now listen," I said finally, "Barr has had a disastrous season. He was desperate. He figured out this McMullen coup as a profitable venture, and, we'll say, his thoughts turned wistfully back to the old days when a show went through a town and lifted everything out of it except the houses. He—"

"That's Jim. He's a square showman because he has t' be."

"So he decides that McMullen will be a good place for a cleanup. Everybody'll be at the show at night, and there'll be loads of money in town. So he lays his plans to stack the show with a few well known boys who can do anything from crack a safe to rob the jewelry stores when the town is almost deserted. If he included the bank—and of course he'd rely on the closeness of McMullen to the river—there'd be no reason why he couldn't get away with more than a half million. However—"

"Sure!" Rariden broke in excitedly. "Why, before the day was out a slick mob could clean up—"

"You know more about the methods than I. Anyway, for the sake of argument, we'll grant that he's planned a financial coup in McMullen. Probably in such a way that he won't be suspected himself. The grifters, escaped into Mexico, will be blamed, with his part, as directing head, unknown. They just hit town under cover of circus day.

"Anyway, granting that, he enlisted Oley Johannsen in with him. Oley has proved himself, definitely, a thug. Maybe Barr knew something about him before. He wants to use Oley for one of two reasons. One might be to hold back the McMullen planes, just as Von Sternberg's man did, to prevent an airplane chase before everybody was safely in Mexico. The other might be to fly the swag over the Border. The last seems more likely to me."

"It does t' me too!" Buck declared.

Those eyes of his were like a couple of torches. His gaunt body was leaning forward, and he was literally aflame with interest. As I talked, it seemed that everything became clearer even to me, and I rushed ahead as if I had read every mind on the lot.

"So he sends you down, with Oley flying you, to get things started, you being innocent of the real intent of your boss. Daly happens to be there, and Oley hears, from your own mouth, that you're spotted. That means that the entire show is thrown under suspicion, although you're innocent in this case.

"And perhaps, as a matter of fact, Oley knew just who Daly was. He's well known, and the fact that he has become a Government employee may be well broadcast over the underworld grapevine system. Anyhow, Oley figures that the projected cleanup is seriously menaced. He takes a chance on getting rid of Daly before he, as a professional investigator, can find out too much. It didn't work.

"Then, it strikes me, Oley decided that perhaps the little soirée wasn't so good. Didn't look too pleasant and sure. He hears a lot about Von Sternberg from our outfit. When he went down to the jail, he might have had any one of several ideas in his head. My idea is that he took a file, pretended to be a Von Sternberg man, gave it to one of the prisoners, and found out where Von Sternberg's hangout was. On the other hand, one of the outlaws might have been an acquaintance of his. The point is, whatever happened, that Oley decided to try to join Von Sternberg and leave Barr and the circus flat.

"Which he did. He tried to stage a mysterious disappearance, because there was no use of throwing suspicion on himself. Just why his ship was used for the jail delivery that night I don't know. Maybe because it was better than any type Von Sternberg had."

"Seems damn' funny," barked Rariden, "that he'd take a long chance like that."

"It wasn't such a long chance. And look at this item. At the worst, Oley was in Mexico with an eighteen thousand dollar ship. And what was to prevent him becoming a high class man in Von

Sternberg's estimation, and also to get more money for himself than he would have had he stuck to the original deal with Barr?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"He tells Von Sternberg that a large chunk of swag is coming across the Border on Monday, stolen, doesn't he? Why shouldn't the minions of our friend Fred be waiting to relieve the first thieves of their loot? Hijack it—"

"Slim, it's right as rain ye are!"

"I think so. That explains Barr's nervousness and incessant cursing of Oley, too. Right away Barr seemed to be sure that Oley had double crossed him some way. Of course, he really isn't sure, but he's afraid so. He'd be a happy man right now if he was positive Oley was dead somewhere in the chaparral between McMullen and San Antone. See? And that's the reason he got himself another ship right away."

"He must 'a' picked up a ship with a crooked pilot right quick."

"Uh—huh. Or maybe the pilot is innocent, but will be forced to do the proper flying at the proper time. The whole thing is bound to be vague in its exact details. But if we're anywhere near right, see what it means? It means that we grab this circus gang with the goods on, and I've got a scheme whereby, after that, we may lead Mr. Von Sternberg, or several of his big chiefs, right into a perfect little trap and get 'em all and get 'em good!"

"What a day that'll be, what a day!" yelped Rariden, his eyes sweeping the lot.

He was trembling with eagerness. Before he could start to speak I rushed on. Time was short, and I had decided in my mind he must not meet Barr before I had finished.

"What I want you to do is this," I told him. "Don't get into any fight with Barr. Stay around the show as our spy, and come into McMullen with it. Collect every bit of information you can, spot all the grifters you can—and work with the detectives in San Antone, too. Then, at McMullen, we'll sweep down on the whole lot as fast as they start to work. That new ship being bought means that Barr hasn't decided to call things off, see? You'll be taken care of—if we have to get a bill through Congress!"

"Sure I will!" he yapped joyously. "Damn it, we got to catch that truck down to the runs. Come on, Slim. We'll finish down to the cars. Ye'll ride the train this night, if I have t' hide ye!"

NATURALLY, conversation was off as soon as all had piled into the small truck, fitted out with benches along each side. The boss canvasman and his four assistants, the menagerie top boss, the lot superintendent, and Buck and I comprised the group which rode the truck to the trains. The light wagons had shut up shop and were trundling toward the train. We passed a steady succession of vehicles, each driver squatting on a high seat like a flea on a flagpole, handling his six or eight horse team skillfully as the procession moved slowly through the town.

I was wrought up, but not too excited to get a kick out of the long, sixty car train, painted white, which was standing in the yards. A steady rumbling indicated the progress of loading the flats, and the shouts of the razorbacks—loading crew—cut through the tinkle of ukeleles. Practically the entire personnel of the show was sitting along the railroad embankment, alongside the cars. Ballet girls and men, performers, animal men, canvasmen. The day's work was over, and their single hour of real relaxation at hand. A quartette sang here, a banjo thrummed there, and a few of the bandmen were conducting a low concert of their own far down the tracks.

"I'm hungry," announced Buck as we clambered out. "We'll git into the pie car before the mob."

"Is that the same as the privilege car?" I inquired, and Buck, now as full of boyish exuberance as an egg is of meat, nodded.

We walked down the line, and the change in him was almost unbelievable.

He threw facetious, bluntly witty remarks to dozens of different people along the embankment. He kidded and razzed and made burlesque love and in general announced to the show at large that Buck Rariden was feeling himself again. Somehow he seemed like the soul of the show to me. His mood colored the spirit of the whole troupe, apparently, and we left ripples of laughter in our wake.

The pie car was the last coach on the train. Half its length was split by a lunch counter. The remaining half of the car was given over to gambling games run by employees of the show itself. There was roulette, klondike, craps and blackjack, with separate tables for stud and draw poker.

"On the level, too," Buck told me. "The show just plays the ordinary percentage."

AFTER doughnuts and coffee we wandered off the car and finished our planning. When the train started moving I got aboard the privilege car with Buck, and was shortly immersed in a poker game. The players comprised Mr. Piebald Peltzer, boss elephant man, so called because of the prodigious freckles which adorned his countenance. Mr. Jumbo Burns, a weazened midget from the sideshow who perched in a special highchair, Ned Graham, star aerialist of the show, Kink Hudkins, a clown, and Miss Claralyne Montmorency, an elegant female albino.

The game was a dollar limit, and I didn't take much interest in it. I was watching and listening to the picturesque crew which packed the car. What interest I had in the game as a game disappeared about the tenth hand. None of the players were spendthrifts, but that albino was the world's champion low better. Remember the famous Scotchman who crossed his homing pigeons with parrots so that when they got lost they could ask their way home? If he and Claralyne had got married it would have been an even bet which one killed the other to reduce the family feed bill.

She called my four queens with an ace full after a one dollar bet.

I found my mind, after that, centered exclusively on the general proposition of a Monday in McMullen and, after I'd forgotten to open on three kings, I gave up and accompanied Buck back to the stag car where he slept. Permanent, built in booths, upper and lower, supplied sleeping accommodations. Each coop had boxes of assorted sizes and shapes nailed to the walls until it took a snake to get into bed and a mummy to stay quiet enough to avoid hitting something. Every time you drew a breath your chest hit a box.

I stayed a while, talking in whispers with Buck, getting everything set. The train was due in San Antone in an hour and a half, and I had no plans for sleep. Sitting on the edge of his bunk, I whispered finally:

"All right, at the matinée tomorrow. And one more thing, Buck. Get this hatred of yours for Duke out of your mind. We've got to work together, and he's the boy that's done most of the figuring on this whole thing. He—"

"A-a-ah, he thinks too much of himself and is too willin' t'—"

"Listen, you simple minded mick! You brought it on yourself, and you're too sensitive. So's Daly. What you went through he went through six times over. And he's as good a man as you are, any day! I say that for this reason. From the time you hit San Antone you take orders from him, if necessary. You're a detective now, and he's boss!"

"Thinks he is," growled Rariden, but there wasn't a great deal of conviction in his tones.

Working with us was an honor to him, but his stubborn grouch, where Daly was concerned, persisted. Somehow I was afraid it might put a wrench in the machinery. And I was commencing to wonder whether I hadn't made a fool of myself by confiding in Buck.

I spent an hour losing forty dollars at klondike in the privilege car, and as I swung off the train in the wan light of dawn I found Mr. Buck Rariden just

appearing through the vestibule for rolls and coffee. Breakfast was served after the big top was up, and not before, in the cook tent.

The Irishman grinned a delighted grin and waved a horny hand.

"McMullen bound, Slim, and give me regards to the Duke!"

CHAPTER XI

SLIM EVANS IS BAIT FOR THE TRAP

FIVE-THIRTY by the clock on Monday afternoon was the exact hour when you, had you been at McMullen on that meaty day, might have seen eight flyers and observers ease their ships down on the airdrome and, after alighting therefrom, ignite cigarets and make their way toward headquarters. We had just finished performing our portion of the field day. We'd flown for half an hour, giving such exhibitions as within us lay, and if you don't think Dumpy Scarth, Tex MacDowell, Jimmy Jennings and that crew could make an airplane sit up and beg, you would need but five minutes observation to convince you that you were wrong.

That was a day for McMullen. It looked as if every man, woman and horse in that part of Texas was there. The park had been packed for the rodeo finals, and according to my experienced eye the crowds left on the streets of McMullen could have filled it again. As Buck Rariden announced jubilantly to me—

"We'll seat fifteen thousand and set ten thousand more or less on the grass this evenin'!"

In pursuance of that laudable ambition, many tons of hay had been ordered for the purpose of bedding down the large number of spectators who couldn't be supplied with seats. The show was just going up then, for the performance—the center poles had to be erected to hold the rigging and the lights. No big top, of course.

We were making for headquarters to see what, if anything, had happened during our brief time in the air. The Duke was on duty, with Kennard, getting telephone calls every five minutes from Sheriff Trowbridge's headquarters in McMullen.

"I don't imagine anything'll blow off until tonight," opined George Hickman, "and maybe nothing then."

"Why not?" I rose to inquire. "They've got something on a half dozen of those bozoes that Buck pointed out already, haven't they? They're just waiting to nab them, so they can have rope enough to hang themselves."

"Sure. Petty grifting and that stuff," agreed Hickman. "But it strikes me that maybe between Rangers, deputy sheriffs, Federal men and what not, the boys'll get wise and lay off."

"I don't think so," Penoch O'Reilly observed, "because as near as I could see in the early afternoon the gendarmes were doing things in a very secretive manner. I watched that fox faced boy who's shadowing that Slimy McRae that's supposed to be a safe man. Say, you could hardly find him even when you were looking for him."

The sheriff certainly did have a plan of campaign which was nothing if not complete. A half dozen men who could shoot the eye out of a gnat at fifty yards were secreted in the bank. There was at least one old time marksman planted in every spot in town which might hold the promise of mazuma to outlaws. Exactly sixteen men, spotted by Rariden, were being inconspicuously shadowed. McMullen, beneath the surface, was an armed camp, and the festive criminals of the Barr-Maxwell circus didn't have a chance. In fact, the rounding up of that gang was taken so much as a matter of course by the flyers that we scarcely thought of it. It was what lay beyond their capture that held our youthful minds.

"WHAT'S new, Duke?" boomed Penoch O'Reilly as we trooped into the office.

Kennard, Daly and Tex MacDowell were there. Tex had had a wreck two days before, and his wrist and one leg

were *hors de combat* for a few days.

"Nothing," stated Daly, "except that five more houses were robbed during the afternoon show and the boys that did it are known. They're not rounding 'em up yet. Still giving them plenty of leeway to see just how far they'll go."

"Boy, if they only knew what they were up against!" chuckled Jimmy Jennings.

"Everything is working out very well," agreed Daly evenly. "However, now that you're all here, there are a few changes in plans which I want to suggest."

Quiet fell so suddenly that it was a shock. Daly's face was very serious, his eyes absent looking.

"We agree that it seems very probable that Barr's new Jenny is to be used to carry one man and the loot over the Border," Daly reminded us. "The fact that it's being kept at that outlying field, instead of here on the airdrome, seems to verify our judgment. The others—providing the bank robbery and two or three other big jobs are pulled, as we believe—will doubtless get to the Border, they think, by automobile. The fact that three big cars have been hired by circus men this afternoon seems to make that a strong probability.

"I have been thinking and talking it over, and it is my conviction that Von Sternberg, if he plans to enter the situation at all, will be in this position. He doubtless knows by now that the show has hired a new ship. Oley Johannsen will believe, from that, that the original plan will be carried out. Oley will likewise believe that his disappearance is considered to be just that—a wreck somewhere in the mesquite. They probably consider that there was a very slim chance of recognizing the camouflaged ship.

"However, Von Sternberg, with Oley's advice, must figure on two possibilities—carrying the loot over by ship, or on land. Consequently, he will have a ground crew waiting to pick up the fugitive cars, and also ships in the air to pot an airplane.

"All this has been gone over before, of course, as well as his reckoning on the possible chase of the bandits by us. I do not think that he would send another ship over here, as he did in the case of the jail delivery, to keep us on the ground. He would bank on the fact that we'd learned our lesson, and had arrangements made to circumvent such a possibility, which of course we have."

Those preparations, I may say, consisted of having a ship, under the chaperonage of Jack Beaman, planted fifteen miles away. Jack would be on the telephone constantly, and the second an outlaw ship tried to squat above the airdrome and keep us on the ground Mr. Beaman would sneak up on it and shoot it down with much enthusiasm and not a little gusto.

"I think our original plan of getting the aerial bandits which we believe will be in the air is wrong," Daly went on, talking without haste.

He seemed to be choosing his words carefully, thinking out loud, feeling his way. He was summing up the elements of the situation, as if to remind us of them and thus be sure that our judgment was given in the light of all the facts.

"We agree that if Von Sternberg tried to hijack an airplane, he wouldn't trust to one ship. Two, at least, to avoid the ruining of the coup by a forced landing, and in my judgment he'd send three planes if he has them. They can not figure on less than approximately half a million dollars, if we've figured out the plans of Jim Barr at all accurately. He wouldn't make elaborate plans for small money.

"Now then, they're in this position. They aren't sure of anything. Oley can't be positive that the projected sacking of McMullen hasn't been given up. They can't be positive that his ship wasn't recognized. A lot of things. All of these things will make them unusually wary. They're so smart they may even take into consideration the possibility of a trap. With Von Sternberg's standing in Mexico, he may even have heard that the United States has applied for, and gotten, permission to fly over Mexico.

"The point is this. We planned to put two or three ships in the air at the first indication that the bandits were busy in McMullen, send them up to sixteen or seventeen thousand feet to lie in wait until our decoy ship was pounced on by Von Sternberg. It seems to me, in the light of all the possibilities in the situation, that putting two ships into the air no matter how high, would probably be sufficient to warn off the Von Sternberg gang. They'd be watching very closely. The chances of the ships' escaping observation seem to me slight, if the men we're after are as wary as I think they'll be."

"BUT HOW else can we do it?" protested Kennard. "If we wait until the decoy ship radios that it's sighted the bandits, and then take off, we wouldn't be sure we could land 'em."

"No," agreed the Duke. "They will probably realize soon after they pounce on the decoy ship, that it isn't a Jenny and that it is a decoy. Of course, they may not. But if I, in the decoy ship, should horse around and try to double back to the river, making them chase me, they'd know with equal surety that there was something wrong. Why would any one want to land back in this country, and go to jail as well as lose the money, when if they stayed in Mexico and obeyed Von Sternberg they'd at least retain their liberty? So trusting to our DH's taking off after a radio message, and being able to do anything, has poor chances of success."

"Exactly," I broke in. "So the first scheme is the only—"

"I don't think so," the Duke said evenly. "This camouflaged Briston plane we got from Donovan is capable of a hundred and thirty-five miles an hour, you say, and is built for a two seated fighter. I've been talking to Sergeant Grady, sort of sketching things out. My idea is this.

"I'll take off in the Briston as a decoy, as planned. I'll fly in the back seat. I'll have a contraption which the sergeant can fix up whereby I can control my front guns from the back seat. They'll be camouflaged with a false cowling. I'll also have a special gun mount for rear seat guns which will allow them to be mostly out of sight until needed. A special bar, like a straight scarf mount, across the top of the cockpit—"

"Then what?" demanded Tex MacDowell, crouched in his chair, his eyes burning.

"Why then," Daly said with the utmost calmness, "I fly out over Mexico and they hop me. They order me to fly south at their direction, of course, which I start to do. I watch my chance, and as soon as it comes I go into action—"

"And fight three ships single handed!" I burst forth. "Of all the damn'—"

I stopped as my eyes met his. Suddenly the inferences in his proposal swept over me. He was going to bag a considerable number of Von Sternberg's airmen, but it was almost a cinch that he'd lose his own life. It was mad, but it was sublime.

"You see," he went on before the dumfounded bunch could say much, "I am convinced that any other method possible will result in getting none of them—scaring them off. And, after all, with the parachutes we've got and—"

"I believe you're partly right!" roared Penoch O'Reilly, striding up and down the room in ungovernable nervousness. He, you'll remember, had a special reason for wanting to smite Mr. Friederich Von Sternberg a most powerful smite. "And it might work, with two men in the ship, one to handle the rear guns! Alone, it's suicide."

"I shouldn't want any one else to go along," Daly said quietly. "After all, my position is different."

"Means he don't give so much of a damn as we do!" I thought as Penoch O'Reilly whirled on the captain and uncorked a rushing stream of words.

"There should be two in the ship, Cap'n. Let me go, please! Honest, Cap'n—"

"How about me?" shrilled fat little

Dumpy Scarth, leaping from a desk. "I'll fly and the Duke'll handle the rear guns."

"What the hell?" Jimmy Jennings interrupted. "Am I some cripple?"

"Shut up, you crazy halfwits!" bellowed Kennard, as everybody but Tex MacDowell swirled around him.

Tex was the saddest man in the room. He was out of it.

All I could think of was Daly. Tex had told me that he had been commencing to brood a bit over the fact that his usefulness as a Government servant was becoming less and less. His job he considered a way to pay back to society the debt he owed. At the start his experience had been one of his greatest assets. Now it was becoming a liability, evidently. The word was out that Duke Daly was a "dick".

AT THE start of our plans he had insisted on the decoy job. Now, to pour a few shots straight from the Government into the hide of its Rio Grande nuisance, he was calmly figuring on making himself a sacrifice. To him, it was paying society a debt he owed.

"What are you going to do with a guy like that?"

"Listen, all of you!" Captain Kennard was saying crisply. "The more I think of it, the more I think that the Duke's idea isn't bad—with two men. With guns camouflaged, you can get into action and completely surprise them. The time's come when we've got to teach the gang a lesson they'll never forget. It's going to be a tough spot; but it's got to be done. Every man that had experience over the lines in France who wants to volunteer, will have a chance to sit in on a cold hand of poker right now—including George M. Kennard!"

Beaman and Cravath were nesting fifteen miles away, and Tex was crippled, and almost crying. Consequently, only nine glittering eyed, khaki clad young cuckoos of the McMullen flight, Border Patrol, United States Army Air Service, stood around a table while the captain dealt each one a poker hand, face up. Back of him the immobile Duke looked on. His eyes had a funny look in them. I guess he couldn't understand why we wanted to go.

Card after card dropped. Penoch O'Reilly raised a wild shout as he got two aces on the fourth card, high hand. I was looking at my hand stupidly. I didn't have a chance. Four unpaired little ones—

"Shucks, I'm sunk," I said, and started to turn away.

I was sick with disappointment.

"Slim, damn it!" roared O'Reilly a second later. "A straight, you lucky stiff!"

And it was. The fact that I'd overlooked the possibility shows how dazed I was. My eyes leaped to Daly's, and his were warm and eager. He seemed to be aglow with fierce anticipation.

"Great!" was all he said, and I echoed it.

I'm crazy.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

AT NINE o'clock that night he and I were sitting alongside the trim little Briston we'd borrowed from Donovan Field for this very purpose. We were in a pasture lot, five miles from town, and casual word had been spread in town that the ship had had a forced landing just at dusk. We were taking no chances on a takeoff at the airdrome. Who could tell what the information system of the outlaws was? Or what plans they had centering around the prevention of any ship's leaving the field?

We could see, plainly, the lighted area which indicated the location of the thronged ball park. The circus lights, hung from the center poles, provided a cluster of illumination in the sky.

I was nervous as a witch, but the Duke seemed very calm. I lighted my hundredth cigaret and started to pace up and down in the darkness.

"Well," I ruminated, just for some-

thing to say, "my gamble on Rariden sure won, didn't it? We couldn't have asked for any better cooperation."

"Uh-huh. I guess his mental mood is about like mine."

"Funny, temperamental egg," I observed. "Did he give any indication of getting over his hatred for you?"

"No."

I threw away the half smoked cigaret and lighted another for no reason. My eyes were constantly flickering in the direction of the field.

"I hope Von Sternberg in person appears tonight," I said, as if I hadn't said it before.

"Let's start by hoping anybody appears," suggested Daly calmly. "It would be a joke if all this careful structure proved to be a delusion—"

"There she is, by God!" I shouted, and my voice sounded queer even to myself.

The Duke was on his feet as if shot from springs. A rocket was arching into the sky above the airdrome, followed a second later by another.

As we leaped for the ship I scarcely knew whether I was afloat or ashore. Those rockets meant that the circus grifters had struck, and been taken.

"The bank, sure as hell!" Daly was saying as he spun the prop. "That would be the only spot for important money, anyway. I'll bet a fight's on at the circus ship right now, too—somebody'll be trying to get away."

"But we were right, and they must have been nabbed pretty!" I shouted.

We had figured that the bank and the ticket wagon would be the principal objectives of the gang. The bank robbery might easily be the work of the whole crew of fifteen or twenty, dependent upon shooting it out in the deserted town, working for speed rather than secrecy.

Never in my life have I felt as I did when I shoved the throttle forward and the Briston leaped ahead into a wall of darkness. It was one of those periods in life which make one cease to kick about being born.

I didn't bother to glance back at McMullen. I sent the Briston full speed ahead, straight for the river, climbing as steeply as I could. My eyes were concentrated on the starlit sky ahead, searching it for telltale pricks of fire.

WE CROSSED the river at fifteen hundred feet, going higher every second. We had agreed that if aerial hijackers were going to strike they would do so close to the Border. They could not possibly figure on picking up a lonely ship if they allowed it a half hour in the air. They would have to spot it quickly.

My eyes swept the heavens eagerly. Five miles, ten, south of the Border. Below, the endless chaparral was like a black blanket, unrelieved by any sign of civilization. Had our calculations been wrong? I was thinking—

The Duke's hand was gripping my arm. I followed his pointing finger. High in the sky, coming from the west, and back of us, were three planes, flying a loose V formation.

My eyes met Daly's, and my body froze. I felt a lump in my throat, and I was tingling from head to foot.

Steadily we plowed ahead, climbing all the time. We were close to six thousand feet, now, as the three bandit planes swooped down upon us. They wouldn't shoot, of course. There would be no point in wrecking us in the mesquite, with the likelihood of the supposed loot being burned.

Both of us were looking around as one of the ships eased up alongside us. The other two stayed back of us, and four hundred feet higher than we were.

The bandit ship was a Sparrow—a good commercial plane which was almost as fast as our Briston, but not so maneuverable. The others, I thought, were the same type. But one figure was in it, and as my eyes strained to identify it I thought, almost, that I could recognize Oley Johannsen.

He was motioning forward, and then the goggle eyed pilot patted on the cowl-

ing before him. Then he pointed back at the other two ships. His meaning was clear. We were to fly as he directed us. He was pointing southwest.

Had the Duke radioed the flight? I was thinking, and then realized how silly my doubt was. That was the first thing he would have done. But he had had to wind in the antenna to avoid giving ourselves away, so that our course from then on would be unknown to McMullen. We were strictly on our own.

THAT pilot over there seemed to be scrutinizing us closely. My front guns were camouflaged with a false cowling, open at the front end for shooting purposes. In the rear cockpit Daly's double Lewis was out of sight. It was fitted with a special clasp which made its attachment to the circular scarf mount a matter of only a few seconds.

"If that's Oley Johannsen, he may be suspicious of our appearance and our ship," I thought to myself.

I was flying with the throttle set at fourteen hundred, to disguise the speed of our ship. I cut the throttle, and yelled to Daly:

"We'd better work fast. I think that's Oley over there."

The Duke nodded, his face pale and set. It was a tough break, having those two ships behind and above us; but we had discussed our exact tactics in every possible situation.

Tensed until I thought something within me would break, I waited. Oley, if Oley it was, was about a hundred feet to our right. He was still peering at us, trying to get closer, but I wouldn't let him.

Suddenly I felt that grip on my arm. I looked around. Daly, leaning forward, nodded. I drew in a long breath, and with a prayer to whatever gods there be I threw my ship into a vertical bank.

In a trice its nose was pointed at the ship alongside us, and I had my bead. Flame flared from the nose of the Briston as the burst of bullets poured into the ship ahead.

I gasped with relief as I saw the ship falter, and the pilot slump in his seat as I zoomed over it. The next instant it was spinning down, out of control. In the back seat the Duke would have his guns ready now.

WHAT we had hoped would happen did not. The men in the ships above must have been watching us closely. As I ended my zoom they had split widely, and one of them was diving on us, his guns spitting fire. The windshield was shattered before my eyes as I threw my ship into a reversement to get out of the way.

It was one against two, but we had two gunners and they only had one man to a ship.

The next three minutes are almost a blank to me. I was throwing my ship all around the sky. Always it seemed to me that one of our antagonists had a bead on us. Daly was unable to shoot accurately, because the Briston was like an aerial outlaw flinging itself about. I dived and zoomed and banked and turned. The second I saw one of those planes ahead of me I pumped lead, but mostly I was getting out of the way. The world seemed to be shaking to the roar of the motors. Holes appeared all over the Briston. Back of me, Daly, crouched low, was shooting almost continuously as we were gradually forced down.

Suddenly, as I completed a quick turn to get out from under one ship which was diving at us, I saw the second one flash across my nose. I held the gun control down, and kept it there. I pulled up in an Immelman turn. As I did so I thought that the enemy plane had faltered, as if badly hit. The Briston was vibrating terribly, and the motor was cutting out. We were about at the end of our rope . . .

"Heh!" I bellowed exultantly then, as I saw the second victim of our guns spinning downward. One against one, now.

I banked again, searching for the remaining ship. As I did so it seemed that a hail of bullets penetrated the already crippled Briston.

The next second the Duke was yelling in my ear.

"They shot my guns out of commission!" he bellowed.

Banking automatically to save ourselves, I took a quick look behind me. Both his hands were bloody. That burst had evidently struck his guns, and his hands had been upon them.

The bandit ship was coming at us again, from the side. He shot as I turned toward him, and tried to dive under him. I took a quick shot myself, and my hot guns did not answer.

"A jam!" I groaned, and it seemed that the Duke understood what had happened as quickly as I did myself.

I went into a spin, as if out of commission. It lost us precious altitude, but it was the only way to save ourselves, at that moment.

Again the Duke was standing up, and he had cut the throttle. Beneath us the two stricken airplanes were burning, spots of red against the chaparral.

"Jump!" he yelled. "You first!"

He was right. So long as we were in our ship, the remaining outlaw would fight it out. He would think that we would, or could, trail him home. Doubtlessly he wanted to escape as badly as we did. Once we jumped, we were helpless, and he might let us go. In the ship we were lost souls; in a parachute, we had a chance.

The Duke held the ship steady for a moment after I had brought it out of the spin. I got out on the wing and dived off, my hands on the ripcord ring. If I ever thanked God for anything it was that we had borrowed chutes from the parachute school at Donovan Field. They were new in those days.

I let myself fall for five seconds before I pulled the ring. I went limp with relief as I felt it open, and the pain which came as I was bent double with the shock of stopping was very sweet to undergo. Swinging in great arcs below the big silk umbrella, I searched the sky for Daly.

He was still in the ship, without guns, and was diving and twisting through the sky, pretending to fight his opponent:

"He never intended to jump. He's staying up there so that I can land without being shot at!" I told myself dazedly, and the full meaning of what he had done scarcely penetrated my stunned mind.

I will always believe that that was his principal reason for making me jump first, and for remaining in a crippled ship, without guns, and pretending to fight. But he had decided also to make a good job of the cleanup of the Von Sternberg gang.

WHILE I was still five hundred feet from the ground, my eyes glued on the roaring battle above, I saw it happen. The altitudes of the ships were hard to figure, but I thought that Daly was below, a helpless victim of his armed opponent. But, as I watched, a crash almost stunned my eardrums. The motors screamed and then seemed to cease functioning.

Daly had deliberately collided with the last of the bandits.

An instant later a body was hurtling down toward me. It had scarcely started earthward when it was followed by a second one. Two white spotches appeared against the sky.

"He's alive!" I yelled. "Both of 'em are!"

I saw the two ships, still tangled together, hit and make the third bonfire on the ground. A second later my body was crashing through a low mesquite tree. By the grace of God I hadn't hit the middle of it, but the tips of its branches, and I didn't break a bone. But I was a scratched and bloody spectacle as I loosed my harness and ran for a small opening in the chaparral, the better to see the descent of the two men above me.

The fight was not over yet. They were about a hundred yards apart, I estimated, and they were shooting it out with revolvers!

Just for a moment, though. Suddenly the unknown outlaw—I could tell him because he had on neither boots nor puttees, as Daly had—seemed to be

hauling on his chute. He gathered in the shroudlines, and he was dropping like a comet. Three hundred feet from the ground he let it flap wide open again to break his speed.

That's where I got busy, cursing myself for my dumbness in standing there like a ninny, I should have been under way long before, toward the spot where the jumpers would land.

It was hopeless now, as far as I was concerned, but I crashed through nevertheless. The Duke was not slipping his chute at all. The bandit had landed, and Daly would be an easier mark in a revolver duel than a man on the ground.

I saw Daly land, a quarter of a mile from me as I tore through the thin chaparral. He was waiting for me, weak and dizzy, but alive.

"I cracked some ribs on a limb," he told me slowly. "The Von Sternberg man landed all right—I saw him cut himself loose and take off through the mesquite. No use of chasing him."

"And after all, he put up a good fight," I remarked. "Here come the DH's."

And they were on their way, drawn by the fires. With the flashlights, provided for just such emergencies, we signaled our safety, and three DeHavilands frisked over our heads joyously before we started our fifteen mile trek to the nearest landing field, which was close to the Rio Grande.

It was a long walk, what with the Duke's weakness, but we made it. His finger wounds were minor, and if his ribs bothered him too much he didn't complain. As we plowed along northward I said, after some thought:

"I don't want to be sentimental, Duke, but you're a damn' fool that I'll remember forever for what you rooked me into tonight. Staying up there and making me jump to safety."

"Don't be silly," he commanded. "I wanted to get the other fellow."

CHAPTER XIII

FAIR WEATHER

BACK at McMullen we found that our judgment of what had happened was entirely correct.

"Nabbed twelve men at the bank, pretty as you please," Kennard told us. "They couldn't testify fast enough to save themselves a year or so in jail, so old man Barr is behind the bars also. Total haul of eighteen men. And three Von Sternberg flyers. I'd give a lot to know whether Von himself was one of 'em!"

"Wouldn't I?" said Penoch O'Reilly in a heartfelt manner. "But I don't think so. He couldn't be entirely well, you know. He was really in a hospital."

"Which is where the Duke's going right now!" announced Major Searles, our flight surgeon, as he came in the door. "Come on, Duke. You know the news by now, so you sit up no longer!"

Daly went out obediently with the medico, and I told my little private story. I was just finishing it when Buck Rariden came bursting in the door of the office.

"The manager, with no bosses, o' the Barr-Maxwell circus stayed behind t' see how you was, me boy!" he chuckled. "Some detectives we are, what?"

"I'll say," I agreed.

"What a fight ye must have had!" he said enviously, and I orated for his benefit at some length. When I had finished he got to his feet decisively.

"Pardon me!" he said, his mouth twisted in a lopsided, humorless grin. "I'm on me way to go down on me knees t' the Duke!"

Which he did and that, as far as I was concerned, put the last touch to a pleasant episode in line of duty. For it's always fair weather, when good fellows—You know.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

AFTER AGUINALDO

II

GONE GÚGU

WHEN A WHITE MAN in the Philippines adopts native habits to the complete exclusion of those of his native land, he is said in local parlance to have "gone *gúgu*." Many good men have travelled this route from various causes, but few have lasted long. Occasionally one may be seen in the remote provinces, and once in a coon's age in the suburbs of Manila.

I recall one of the latter class who resided in Pasay. His nickname was Colombo, he being an Italian-American. Originally he had been a fisherman in Sicily but he came to the Islands in a volunteer regiment and eventually received an excellent discharge.

Instead of going to work for the quartermaster or some commercial firm, Colombo annexed an *asawa*—a wife—from a fishing village, and purchased a boat. A reversion, you may say, but the life of Filipino fishermen must be different from those of the Mediterranean. This man slept on mats on the bamboo floor, ate rice and fish with his fingers, and talked only in the Tagalog tongue. English and Italian he practically forgot.

He wore a wide spreading *salicut* hat of woven bamboo, rode a water buffalo to market, and when fishing was poor wandered through the fields digging here and there for *gulay*—greens—like any other peasant. Shoes he scorned as superfluous, yet Colombo was no beachcomber, no bum. He was honest and he made his own living, albeit we whites didn't admire the system.

Another I knew was Grady. He was far more *gúgu* than a native himself, and his case was most peculiar. This man's habitat was a tiny Manyan barrio deep in Mindoro. He wore long hair and no clothes like his savage neighbors, and he did no work. The Manyans actually supported him, bringing him gifts of corn, fruits, and the proceeds of the chase. Fish, Grady would and did,

He lived all alone with a tomcat for company, and yet was not a misanthrope, and appeared to like the life. Often have I thought of him sitting at night by that lonesome river listening to the splashes of leaping fish, the coughing of crocodiles, the sharp bark of deer, and the shrill treble of wandering *carabaos* or *tamaraos*.

When I parted from Grady to prospect further upstream, I left him three copies of *Adventure*, and he seemed glad of them. Can you imagine a man "gone *gúgu*" reading the Camp-Fire dope?

What drives a man *gúgu* is a natural question, but one that's hard to answer. It may be square-face gin, it may be love of a woman, it may be the desire to forget the past, and again it may be downright worthlessness. *Quien sabe?* Who knows. Romances might be written of those who hit the native trail, but I don't think I could put one over.

The adopting of the best customs of the Filipino is another matter and no man sacrifices his self-respect by doing so, for the brown men and women of our far eastern protectorate are not lacking in culture and refinement, and the home life of many of them is ideal. It's the white man who forgets his own people entirely who steps down—and out.

—C. A. FREEMAN.

Double Up!

'Twas pay day out at the Bar-O-Bar,
An' we'd all rid in to the Alcazar,
To wet our whistles an' grease our lips,
An' mebbe rattle a stack o' chips.
A harder crew you would seldom see;
There was Ike, an' Badger, an' Tex, an' me,
An' a scar-faced coot called Alkali,
Who packed two guns, an' a killer's eye;
But the saltiest lad of the hardboiled lot
Was the rancho's foreman—Big Sam Scott.

We had just surrounded our second drink
Of forty-rod, when a flossy gink
Comes easin' in through the swingin' door,
An' jingles his spurs on the bar-room floor.
Tex sees it first, an' says he to me:
"It's shameful the things which a man will see,
Afore he has hardly begun to fight
This mixture of ether an' dynamite."
I looks, an' yelps: "Well, I do declare!
The answer has came to 'The Maiden's Prayer!'"
The bunch swings around an' feasts their eyes
On a dimpled kewpie in deep disguise.
Surmountin' his head is a ten-quart lid
With a snakeskin band, which mostly hid
The tight blond curls of an angel boy,
With a face like Little Lord Fauntleroy.
Around his neck was a four foot square
Of violet purple silkworm hair;
His orange chaps must have cost the coats
Of an entire herd of Angora goats;
An' the shirt he wore was the ardent pink
Of the settin' sun in a desert sink.

He hesitates when he gets inside,
As coy an' shy as a new-made bride;
An' his pale blue eyes appears to be
Offerin' humble apology,
Like he don't know whether to run or not;
Which rouses the ire of Big Sam Scott,
Who fixes the kid with an ugly sneer,
An' says he: "The feline which drug that here
Was shore depraved, an' should be erased,
As a menace to eyesight, an' public taste."

Then he shifts his chaw to a fresher place,
An' he ambles over to Baby-face,
An' says he: "I don't like the clothes you wear;
Nor your ears, nor your nose, nor your curly hair."
Then he tips us fellers a wall-eyed wink,
An' he hooks a thumb in them folds of pink,
An' the gorgeous tints of that garment frail
He splits complete, from her neck to tail.
The cherub stares like he's shocked an' hurt,
An' says he: "Now, Mister; you've tore my shirt!"

Then Sam unhitches his well-notched gat,
An' he makes a grab for that ten-quart hat,
Which he chucks right out in the open street,
Where he ventilates her, most complete.
The kid, he sighs like it's awful sad,
An' he shakes his head, like it's too dang bad,
An' he looks at Sam with a sheepish grin,
An' he swings with his right on Samuel's chin;
An' Sam, he sails through the atmosphere,
An' skids nine feet on his off-side ear.

Then, havin' begun, this angel child
Drops all restraint, an' he goes hog wild.
It happens I'm next in his line of fire,
So he gathers me up in his arms, entire,
An' he heaves me out to the open air,
To meditate on "The Maiden's Prayer";
An' to gaze with awe through the busted door,
While he goes ahead an' completes his chore.

He swings up a foot an' dots the eye
Of that two-gun killer, Alkali;
He hooks a spur into Tex's shins,
An' knocks him out where the West begins;
An' he scatters the remnants, near an' far,
Of the rest of the crew from the Bar-O-Bar.
Then he hists his foot to the old brass rail,
An' he tucks in the ends of his pink shirt-tail,

An' he speaks polite, in a gentle voice:
"I'm buyin', gentlemen; name your choice."

We assembles ourselves an' our wrecked remains,
An' our large assortment of aches an' pains;
An' meek an' mild as a Siwash klootch,
We briefly mentions our choice of hootch.
An' the shot *he* takes in an offhand way,
Is a four-ounce slug of Hudson's Bay;
Which ain't no kind of a minor feat,
When you ignores water, an' takes it neat.
Then Big Sam Scott rubs his swollen chin,
An' he orates thus, with a friendly grin:

"I wishes to state, if Your Honor please,
I plumb reverses my first idees.
I likes the cut of your curly hair;
Your ears, your nose, an' the clothes you wear;
An' the trouble I've caused through bein' mistook;
I hopes an' craves you will overlook."
The cherub waggles a pink nailed hand,
An' he smiles an' answers, serene an' bland:
"That sort of thing to me's no trouble;
I'M a western movie hero's double!"

—LARRY O'CONNER

Custer's Last Stand

WILL any of our readers who remember or have the magazine referred to by Mr. Hooper communicate with him directly; it appeared forty-odd years ago.

For some time past I have been reading up on the subject of the Custer fight of June 25, 1876, and have been making a diligent search for early magazine articles on that subject. I have the article by Gen. E. S. Godfrey published in the *Century* January, 1892, the article by Gen. Chas. King published in *Harper's* August, 1890, article by Dr. Chas. Eastman published in the *Chautauquan* about 1890, all of the articles by Dr. Brady published in *Pearson's* during 1904, and a number of articles of lesser importance published at later dates than above mentioned, but there was an article, and a rather pretentious one, which appeared in an illustrated magazine at a much earlier date, say between June 25, 1876, and before the end of 1885, but possibly not later than 1883.

I saw and read the article when I was about 12 years old, but at that time I did not pay any attention to anything except the reading matter, therefore do not recall the name of the magazine or the name of the writer. It was an illustrated magazine of the two column type about the size and shape of the *Century, Harper's* or *Scribner's* of that period. The article was written by some one who had been over the field very shortly after the fight and before the killed were buried, possibly some one with Gibbons' command.

The writer was very critical of Reno and Benteen, and said "They should have ridden to the sound of Custer's carbines." He told of finding the body of a soldier, possibly Sergeant Butler, with empty cartridge shells lying all around, and expressed the belief that the dead cavalryman had sold his life dearly; of finding a letter from a girl in Chicago signed "Mamie." The article was illustrated with at least one drawing that I remember, showing Reno's men getting water from the river during a lull in the fighting. It contained a number of reproductions of photographs of officers of the Seventh Cavalry, some of whom were killed in the fight. Among these I distinctly recall Lieuts. McIntosh, Harrington, Hodgson, Crittenden and Reilly. I also seem to faintly recall Adjutant Cooke, Capt. Keogh, and Lieuts. Godfrey, Varnum and Calhoun, but am absolutely sure of the first five mentioned.

I have examined a great many illustrated magazines of that period, and have corresponded with a number of publishers and others, but so far have not been able to get a trace of the particular article I am seeking. I am hoping that you will give this letter space in Camp-Fire, and that the keen eye of some old-timer will light on it and that he will hasten to write me giving the information I seek, or else publish it in the Camp-Fire section and advise me when it will appear. I saw the article when I was only ten or twelve years old, and if I can remember as much of it as I do after the lapse of from 45 to 48 years surely there must be many others who remember it, and possibly some who may even have a copy of the magazine containing the article.—E. H. HOOPER, 1336 Grand Avenue, Piedmont, California.

Blowing 'Round The Earth!

CAPTAIN OLE BULL of the Norwegian-American Steamship Line offers a word of caution in respect to his formula for determining the probable height of waves by square root. Giving the source of the formula, which has proved so interesting to many correspondents of this magazine, Captain Bull warns that it can be used only within reasonable limits.

"The formula concerning the height of waves, I found years ago in Captain Lecky's well known tome, 'Wrinkles in Practical Navigation.'

Since then I have mentioned it to a professor in meteorology, H. U. Sverdrup, who subscribed to it.

But it must be kept in mind that there are several provisions. Otherwise one might offer the objection that waves in the region south of Cape Horn might reach unlimited heights, since a westerly wind will blow clear around the earth at this latitude. Of course there is a limit, but I do not know where to apply it.

On the other hand, at no time is it probable, even there where westerly winds prevail, that they should blow from the same direction all around the earth, or rather the water.

To recapitulate, the formula contained in my former letter should for all practical purposes hold good."—CAPT. OLE BULL.

Ammunition For Kodiaks

COMRADE SHAW, out of the wealth of his experience in the most absorbing wild game country of North America, comments on a story by F. R. Pierce, a novelette by W. W. Winter—and adds some information concerning firearms most interesting to read.

"Ever since reading 'The Gunlock Saga,' by that excellent writer, Bill Winter, it has stayed with me—probably always will. It brought back old memories, for that yarn was drawn from life. This is so, to such an extent that I just couldn't help writing Winter a little note of appreciation, which I enclose with the request that you forward it to him.

While I'm at it—referring to letters exchanged between Frank Pierce and a certain Mr. Lee about the story, "Courage," in Camp-Fire.

I can supplement your simile of the "Mallet locomotive" by the statement that the hide alone of the average big brown bear (Kodiak) weighs around 300 lbs. If you knock over one back from the beach, you can't pick up the hide and pack it to your boat—you've got to *roll* it down to tidewater. I'm living at the southern range limit of the Kodiak bear, but we have plenty of them here.

These big babies seem to be gregarious, and they generally travel in bands of from several up to a dozen. Nothing unusual to see eight or ten of them trekking along the beach together. They are not unlike the grizzly, in that they are so conscious of strength that they see no reason for giving trail to anything on four or two legs. Like most wild game, they will not molest human beings unless injured, or cornered; but they do manage to kill a Siwash or two every season. Great to-do up here right now about slapping a cash bounty on them, for last July they destroyed thirty or forty of the prize cattle and sheep being raised up here by aspiring farmers, and accounts of their depredations come in regularly from all over Alaska.

Friend of mine took a party of chechakos out for brownies, to a certain unfrequented bay known to be lousy with 'em. The hook wasn't down before they saw many from the deck, and soon counted nearly forty by aid of glasses.

One of the daring hunters levelled his glass at a big adult that was on its hind legs in the tall beach grass sizing up the layout. The glass brought Brownie's big map right up within arm's reach and the sight was evidently too much for his courage.

"Sa-ay," he asked my friend, swallowing a lump, "why can't we pot what we want from here, *without going ashore?*"

Which was just what they did do. Not one man of that crew of husky Nimrods cared to get closer. *In re* the virtue of the big caliber weapon, I've found that *any* big game can be downed by a .30-30 if hit in right place. That is, the hunter should be a good shot and have a cool set of nerves. Many good shots going against this Kodiak rascal are a bit upset by his mere size, and since the imagination affects his aim despite whatever his common sense may tell him, the bullet is often misdirected. I know of one hunter here who killed a brownie, but it took nine shots, each one registering, while that big brute kept on coming square at him.

I think that the large caliber gun with lots of powder and a heavy ball merely give the hunter the proper feeling of confidence. If he was more familiar with the game and had the same confidence with a .30-30 soft-nose, so that he could reach the right spot, he could down that tough baby with one, or at the most, two shots. This is drawn from my own experience at hunting big game, during the years since about 1893 in most parts of the U. S. A., Canada, B. C., Greenland, and Baffin Land. Take it for what it's worth.

The point is this: I found nothing so incongruous in Mr. Pierce's story, although I'd never advise a chechako to go against a brownie with *any* sort of gun, or weapon (including an arrow) if he was a poor shot. Ergo—you've got to know where the vital spots are located!

My own rifle is a .35 cal. Winchester, which was designed for Kodiak bears, but which I use on all sorts of game. I've even beheaded grouse with it on occasion, no rocks being handy. I sold my .30-30, not needing two rifles. Have used the .30-40 many years and consider it plenty large enough for Big Browns, moose, polars, etc. I've killed two-ton walrus with one shot from .30-30 soft-nose many times.

Hope the above may prove interesting to you, as a break in the dry routine of magazine making. In that regard I want to express my pleasure in your efforts. The contents and covers are getting better all the while. So is Camp-Fire, which is not only back again to normal, but has in my humble opinion gone far beyond anything it formerly attained in make-up and interest. Recent covers are certainly striking.

With best wishes for continued success."

—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Contest—Last Call!

ON DECEMBER FIRST, 1928, at 12 o'clock noon, entries for *Adventure's* D'Artagnan serial contest will close. As stated heretofore, five splendid volumes, each bound with a page of original Dumas—*and* five checks, each for $100.00, will be awarded the writers of the five best short essay criticisms. The winners will be announced in the February first issue of this magazine.

Rawhide Ropes

L. PATRICK GREENE, who started a controversy by having a character in one of his South African tales spin a rope of this description, forwarded this letter from a reader in Pennsylvania.

Re: Rawhide Rope. Is it important whether it is spun or not?

I have never seen a rawhide rope spun, but I have owned two braided rawhide ropes in the form of riatas, and I considered them the finest material for this purpose, as did also the leading men and the leading vaqueros in the northwestern part of Mexico.

The first of these riatas which I purchased was rather ordinary, though the rawhide was cut from the hide in one continuous length, so as to go around the hondo and back, three of these thongs making a six braid rope about 60 feet long, so that each thong would have to be considerably over 120 feet. The second one was a very perfect one with three thongs which could not be seen to vary in width or thickness from each other or in their entire length, and were reinforced as braided around the hondo, which was a cartilage.

Two things were against the rawhide rope. One, its cost—even in the old times when labor was paid but eighteen cents a day there. The other I found out with my first rope. I had a habit of placing this around my saddle horse's neck at night, fastening it in such a way that it could not act as a slip-knot, and do away with picketing, depending on, if the horse wandered in the desert, the trace of the rope would be sufficient to find him, but the coyotes had a habit of chewing the rope, so that I preferred the hair rope for that purpose."

—WM. E. SAUNDERS, Philadelphia, Pa.

Are Contests on the Square?

SOME ARE NOT. There probably is real reason for skeptical query on the part of Comrade Green. But before going one inch further, let me say one thing:

To me, *Adventure* is the most whole-souled and honest magazine in all the world. Any accusation or hint of cheapness or shoddiness or dishonor, hits me first—and mighty hard! Whoever among you pay me the compliment of buying and reading, may take for granted, now and always, a complete honesty of intent, will and performance. Why *should* anyone suspect *Adventure?*

Mistakes—yes, of course. Where do they not occur? Crookedness of any shape or form—never!

As an example of the queer mistakes it is possible for an editor—a staff of editors—to commit, may I cite the humorous way in which D'Artagnan retrieves his hat (on one page he is bareheaded; on the next page he loses his hat again!)? Thus far sixteen readers have brought the fact to our attention—and teeth are being gnashed!

Of course this inconsistency will be changed in the book publication.

But let Comrade Green have the floor:

I would like to see this in Camp-Fire anent the contest of Dumas-Bedford-Jones. Now *Adventure* has started something new. Other papers have had similar contests which have been fakes, as see that article by Roy McCardell in *Saturday Evening Post* of some time ago telling how he won a couple of contests in the daily papers. He sent his contribution in a fancy box that cost about $25 so that it would catch the eye of the judge who as he said paid no attention to common envelopes. One such contest just finished in Chicago the paper stated that the winner sent his in a collection of pictures like an album, hand-painted. Now that is not square to the rest of the contestants. Just get right up and state whether we are all going to have a fair show or only those who can send their contributions on something like the Egyptian Pyramids—postage prepaid.

—FRANK GREEN, 2033 Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

I HAVE KNOWN of strange experiences had by authors who submitted their contributions to national contests. I may cite one of these—an experience of mine own. A nationally known magazine, seven or eight years ago, advertised a short story contest. I entered two of my aspiring, youthful efforts.

I never heard from them. In spite of self-addressed envelopes each with full postage, I never saw either script—until much later, when the first of the two appeared in print *in another magazine!*

Needless to say, I made whoopee. And after seven years I finally have been paid—two small amounts—for my efforts.

So I sympathize with Comrade Green, and grant that he has reason to ask questions. But while *Adventure* remains on the newsstands—for always, I hope—he need not fear to trust. *Adventure* will not crook him—or anybody else!

—ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK *Adventure*

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Plantation

GENERAL data on conditions prevalent in Brazil and the Argentine.

Request:—"1. What would be the most profitable to raise in Brazil or Argentina; coffee, cacao, sugar, cotton or fruit?

2. Does cattle or sheep raising pay?

3. What capital is necessary to start a plantation with one of the most paying of the five subjects in question 1?

4. What capital is necessary for beginning a cattle ranch?

5. We would prefer a territory as far away from the nearest civilization as possible. What districts do you recommend for plantations? For cattle?

6. What climate prevails in these districts?

7. Is hunting good in these parts? What animals?

8. What is the value of land in this territory?

9. Does the government help the farmer or rancher in any way? Could land be gotten from the government?

10. In what country or district could one forge his way with the smallest capital and how?

11. Providing free land is procured, could anything be done with 30,000 francs?

12. Could one find a wild, unworked but fertile territory? Where?

13. Transportation to and from recommended districts?

14. Physical description of recommended territory; rivers, forests, etc.

15. If one is to start in a wild country, what equipment should be taken along?

16. Could native lands be gotten. How?"

—S. URH, Paris, France.

Reply, by Mr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—If you are to be in Paris during the next year I should advise your getting in touch with the consuls of Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina and through them seek to meet some of the many Latin Americans that live in Paris. You could get a great deal of valuable information from them. I shall answer your questions by number.

1. All are very profitable products in Brazil but none of them is of any great importance in the Argentine.

2. Near railroads cattle in Brazil and Argentina pay very well. Argentina exports a large percentage of the world's meat. Sheep, I believe, don't do so well in Brazil, but do well in Argentina.

3. A guess would be that at least $20,000 is the minimum for a very successful farm of any of the above products. Remember that all of these are being exploited on a large scale and the competition of course is pretty fierce. One can begin humbly with less, but in proportion the effort and hardship would be much greater.

4. I should say the same about cattle.

5. Any of the four interior states of Brazil, Minas Geraes, Goyas, Matto Grosso and Amazonas answer the purpose for one or another of these products. In some cases you would be true pioneers and literally have to chop away clearings for your huts. I believe all are suitable for cattle. About the other crops it is hard to say because no systematic effort has been possible in some of them due to their wildness.

6. Roughly the mean average temperature is about 81 degrees. There are cooling rains. Generally it is a dry heat and therefore cool in the shade. Nights are cool. It is a pleasant climate on the whole.

7. Hunting is excellent—coati, canybara, deer, jaguar and other animals abound. There are no elephants or lions.

8. Land is extremely cheap, but I don't know the prices.

9. The Brazilian government offers inducements

to immigrants; any consul can give the details. Yes, land can be got from the government.

10. Probably in Brazil.

11. Yes, a good beginning.

12. Yes, in the states named and almost anywhere in the northern part.

13. None except, legs (and feet), horses, mules, oxen (carts), canoes and river steamers. You can get into parts of the interior by train.

14. Mostly wild virgin forests, thick and dark, many rivers, no lakes, rolling and hilly. Eternally green and extremely fertile.

15. Take everything, but buy it in Brazil. Salt will be the most expensive item.

16. You can generally get a few hands but they are scarce and are not expensive when obtainable. They are loyal but not given to extremely hot—I mean, hard—work. They use the heat as an excuse.

I should recommend writing to the Minister of Agriculture of the states I named above for more specific information.

I hope I have been able to give you some idea of conditions in general.

Barnacles

THIS marine pest really has little need of gallivantin' around, for both bed and board are where he chooses to anchor, merely projecting a tiny brushlike affair to sweep his meals up to his front door.

Request:—"Would copper covered steel, or a heavy percentage of copper in the steel plates prevent barnacles from adhering to the metal or bottom?"—J. E. FULTS, Festus, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Harry E. Rieseberg:—Barnacles and other marine growths will adhere to iron or steel hulls in any condition and are hard things to deal with. There is no sure remedy for such fouling of hulls, but there are several kinds of anti-fouling (so-called) paints on the market, and each manufacturer claims to have the formula for deterring the formation of these marine animals.

Border Patrol

A MEMBER of the Immigration Service enlarges upon Mr. Whiteaker's exposition of the duties of the guardians of the Border.

As a reader of *Adventure* for many years past, I rise to speak out in meeting but in a most friendly sort of way. Mr. J. W. Whiteaker in the July 15, 1928, issue sets forth a reply to an inquiry about the Border Patrol. I wish to say that in general his reply is good and I take no issue with the rest of it.

But the point I wish to call Mr. Whiteaker's attention to, however, is that the Border Patrol is strictly an Immigration Service Border Patrol, dealing solely and wholly with the illicit smuggling and bootlegging of undesirable aliens into the U. S. The uniform of the Border Patrol is distinctive from the uniform of the Immigrant Inspector (men in the Border Patrol carry the title of Immigrant Inspector also, but the duties are different). Obviously there are reasons why I do not wish to state the number of men employed in patroling the land borders—Canadian and Mexican and along the seacoasts Atlantic and Pacific and Gulf of Mexico—but suffice it to say it consists of a large number of officers.

The Border Patrol is under its own supervisory head, the dual services, Patrol and Inspection, both being under the Secretary of Labor, of course. The duty of the Border Patrol is solely to apprehend aliens seeking to effect illegal entry along the borders. When apprehended, such aliens are brought by Border Patrolmen to the nearest Immigration Station and turned over to the Immigrant Inspectors who are skilled in handling the formal arrests, granting of hearings, recording testimony, making up records, detail work involved in effecting formal deportation. The Border Patrol work is finished when the alien is delivered at the Immigration Station. From then on the aliens are handled by Inspection officers.

The Border Patrol uniform is of the same cut and pattern as the senior grade Immigrant Inspectors' uniform but carries distinctive markings on coat and breeches so that any immigration employee and others acquainted with the work can tell at a glance whether the officer is a Border Patrolman or a senior grade Immigrant Inspector.

The Border Patrol is being made a very select organization, an ex-Army officer at its head, and the recruits who have had military service are given preference, young men of a high type of intelligence, physique and avid desire for such work being sought. The Civil Service applies as stated by Mr. Whiteaker. The Border Patrol is a national body of officers subject to assignment at any point on the thousands of miles of border lines in the United States.

In passing, I might add that an alien, for example, from Afghanistan, who comes to Mexico seeking easy entrance at night over an unguarded point along the Mexican Border and who is caught by the Border Patrol, is not returned to Mexico but in preference is deported to Afghanistan. If returned to Mexico, such an alien would attempt a re-entry within twenty-four hours in many cases. So it is the practise to return the alien to his birthplace, which is oftentimes on the other side of the earth and not so easy to make another attempt to enter the United States illegally.

The Texas Rangers, city, county officers, U. S. Customs officers, State Quarantine and Federal Quarantine officers and others all cooperate in making patrols, when possible for the other services to join hands with us, but it is the specific and sole duty of the Border Patrol to patrol the borders and do nothing else. In time the Border Patrol uniform will be as well known to the American public as the

uniform of the Royal Northwest Mounted is to a Canadian. It is already sufficiently well known to be feared and there are ample proofs of action that called forth the high courage, discretion and high intelligence for which this organization is becoming noted.

The directing head of this immigration work under the Secretary of Labor is the Commissioner General of Immigration, Washington, D. C., Hon. Harry E. Hull. There is an ésprit de corps among immigration employees that is unsurpassed in any branch of the American Government. There are patriots who risk their lives for the good of their country during so-called peace time who give their lives and have given their lives in the service of their country and of whose work the general public has heard little.

—M. BERTRAND COUCH, Immigration Service, Galveston, Texas.

Photography

THOUGH Mr. Anderson's suggestions cover phases bearing on an extensive trip to far places, they are yet general and complete enough to be of interest and use even to the non-roving cameraman.

Request:—"Taking advantage of *Adventure's* splendid service, I am writing for suggestions and information on photography in its many phases in conjunction with an extensive trip into the East Indies and India, and another trip into the mountainous interior of Tibet and the Gobi Desert.

A small party are planning the trip and hope to be able to make a complete photographic record. While thoroughly familiar with cameras, there are such things as climatic conditions, care of negatives, etc., that we need assistance with.

We would also like information on motion picture machines and that type of photography for such expeditions as we propose."

—GEO. W. SCONCE, Seattle, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—Your worst enemies on the trip you are planning will be: (1) heat, (2) humidity, (3) cold, (4) dust, (5) insects, (6) bad water.

Heat. Use amidol for development. Carry the stuff in the original packages, also a supply of Eastman's anhydrous sodium sulphite. Measure out your quantities with a celluloid salt spoon, such as you can get at the 5-and-10 cent store, and you won't have to carry scales. Of course, weight out one dose at home before you start, and measure the spoonfuls in that; then you're all set to use the spoon in future.

Since amidol works without alkali, it doesn't soften the film as much as other developers. Also, you can harden your films by immersion for ten minutes in a 10% solution of formaldehyde; then they'll stand almost anything in the way of heat; you can even wash them in water just below boiling, and dry over a fire. Of course, this will change your development time, so you'll have to experiment a little before starting.

Humidity. This does two things: makes your negatives slow to dry, and interferes with the keeping qualities of the unexposed films or plates. If you formaldehyde the films, you can, as I said, dry them over a fire. To insure the keeping, pack them before starting in air-tight tin boxes, and seal with surgeons' adhesive tape, which is better than electricians' tape for the purpose. And after development, put them back into the same boxes, though a formaldehyded negative is proof against almost anything.

Cold. This is not so troublesome. It is simply a question of keeping your solutions up to temperature, which you can do if you have a thermometer. And since you can't do tank development without one, why, there you are!

Insects. You'll doubtless encounter "flies and all manner of lice in all your quarters," and such small fry have a decided fondness for soft gelatine. It's highly annoying to get a lot of good negatives, and then find that holes have been eaten in them during drying. Again, the formaldehyde and quick drying will discourage the insects. Otherwise, you'll have to hang cheesecloth around the negatives during drying, and the beauty of this is that it slows the drying tremendously in the very circumstances (tropical climate) when you want the quickest drying.

Dust. You'll meet plenty of it in the Gobi. The air-tight tins with tape seals will help a lot, and it would be well to have air-tight cases for your cameras as well. A. Adams & Co., 24 Charing Cross Road, London, W. C. 2, England, make sheet steel air-tight cases for their cameras, and a similar device is strongly recommended for a trip where you're likely to meet sandstorms. (Incidentally, the Adams Minex tropical model is about the best reflex camera in the world for a diversity of bad climates.) But if you don't have some such protection you'll spend a lot of time wiping out the insides of the cameras and wondering where all the pin-holes in the negatives came from.

Bad Water. Generally speaking, if it's fit to drink it's fit for development, but not invariably. If in doubt, boil it for twenty minutes, allow to settle, and use the top. Of course, almost any water, even sea water, is all right for washing negatives, provided you give them a couple of rinses in clear water to end up, and wash them well when you get home.

IF YOUR traveling plans will let you carry plates, by all means use them in preference to films. They give better results, and keep far better. My own choice would be the Wratten panchromatic, but you'll decide that for yourself. If you are using roll films, of course the Kodak tank is the thing, but if plates or cut films, then the Dallan tank. This is a daylight affair, requiring only that the films or plates be loaded into it in the dark: the rest of the operations can be carried out by daylight.

Of course, any room, or tent, is a darkroom at night, and in a pinch you can sit down cross-legged and have some one pile blankets over you to shut out the light while you load plate-holders or tank. This is a delightful amusement in a tropical climate.

One thing about the Dallan tank—it doesn't drain clean. I had two short pieces of ¼ inch brass tubing soldered to the bottom of the plate rack in mine, and the whole rack heavily nickel-plated. This raises the bottom of the plates above the small amount of solution which remains when the tank is drained. These tanks are sold by Willoughby, Inc., 112 West 32nd Street, New York City.

As for developer. If you prefer, you can get Burroughs Wellcome's amidol tabloids, which will be more convenient to carry than the bulk amidol and sulphite, and a darned sight more expensive. You know how much you can spend on the job.

Unless temperatures are above 90° F., it is generally best to use the formaldehyde between development and fixing rather than before development, as the latter not only changes development time, but may alter the negative quality somewhat. Of course, wash between the various treatments—but you doubtless know that. Some people claim that a formaldehyded gelatine is apt to crackle and split off a glass plate, though not off a film. This hasn't been my experience, but you'd better try a few before you start, to make sure for yourself..

AS TO movies. I can't tell you what camera to get without knowing how much you want to spend. But in any of the standard makes—Kodak, Bell and Howell, De Vry, Debrie, Akeley, etc.—you get just what you pay for; they're all reliable. Pick out the one that fits your pocketbook, after looking them all over. Carry an assortment of lenses of different focal lengths. If you are doing this just for your own amusement, by all means use a camera taking the 16 mm. film, but if you have any notion of selling your movies or publishing them, use the standard size 35 mm.

I would prefer a motor-driven camera to a hand-cranked one, but this again is a matter of preference. If you're going to develop your movie films en route, communicate with R. P. Stineman, 918 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, regarding his system. It is very compact and convenient. Aside from this, anything which applies to the care of films applies also to movie work.

And bear in mind that no protection is too good for your camera if you run into a dust storm. The darned stuff goes everywhere!

American Indians

GENERAL information about their arts and crafts.

Request:—"Will you kindly furnish me with the following information concerning the American Indian?

1. What were some of the means of livelihood of the American Indian?

2. Could you give any information as to the process used by the Indians in decorating their pottery, notably dye colors used?

3. What was the process employed by them in tanning their hides, without having at their command the facilities of our modern factories?

4. Can you give me a list of some of the more commonly practised dances of the Indians, and as to where I may obtain information concerning the significance and ways of execution of those various dances? I believe this to be too broad a subject to be treated in a letter."

—JOHN O. LENFERINK, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—1. In primitive times the Indians lived by hunting, fishing and (in most cases) by agriculture. There were artisans among the Indians who lived by the product of their skilled fingers. There were fine pipe makers, bow and arrow makers. Not all Indian men were good hunters; not all were expert fishermen, nor were they handy with the primitive tools. Consequently they did whatever they could; and lived on the proceeds of their craft. In proportion perhaps to our elements of society, more men were hunters or fishers, but even so, the tribes were divided into various social strata which might find their equivalents in our own scheme of living today. There were the war leaders and the diplomats, the members of the priesthood and the doctors. Each had his own place and fitted into the affairs of the community.

2. Dyes and pigments used in decorating their leather, wood, pottery, faces, etc., were made from the various parts of plants, leaves, roots, stems, berries, flowers, etc., from the bark of trees, roots of trees, juice of cactus, and from many earths and minerals. One mineral for example, kaolin, is used by the Zuni Indians to decorate their gourd rattles, whiten clothing, paint houses, pottery and their faces.

3. Tanning was done in several ways. Hides were tanned with and without the hair. About six main processes were used in the old days, to wit: fleshing, scraping, braining, stripping, graining and working. For each process a different tool was needed. On hides dressed for robes the hair was retained. If you desire a detailed description of the various steps in skin dressing, consult the item on "Skin and Skin Dressing," pages 591-594, Vol. 2, Bulletin 30. Handbook of the American Indians, Bureau of American Ethnology.

4. As to the dances, I would recommend that you read the articles on "Dances" and "Ceremonies" in Vol. 1 of the Handbook. It will give you some idea of the various types of dances. You might also read, "The American Indian" by Clark Wissler for a good, general view of the culture of both North and South America.

Man Eating Ants

MR. FOLEY suggests that any one who is unfortunate enough to choose one of their nests as a resting place is in for a rough spin.

Request:—"Some time ago the papers carried a story about a cowboy who fell from his horse somewhere in the country around Sydney and, being helpless, was nearly devoured by man eating ants. A searching party arrived in time and rescued him.

Can you put me right in regard to this? I will be very much obliged if you can tell me something of this instance, and if possible, like occurrences."

—GEORGE E. KELLY, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—I can find no record over here of the occurrence you mention, but it is certainly no unknown thing for a wounded and helpless man to be attacked by ants.

Personally I should classify blow-flies (which are responsible for ravages among sheep) and ants as the two worst pests with which this continent is afflicted.

Ants are to be found extensively in every portion of the country. I don't know their scientific names; but we know many kinds, of which "sergeant," "bulldog," sugar, meat, red, white, black and blue ants are the commonest. They vary in size from minute specks to real hefty fellows about an inch long.

Some of them are carnivorous, and many species will fight to the last ant if you disturb their underground nests or "hills."

The term "hill" is mostly a misnomer. It refers to a slightly raised and hardened surface under which the ants build a honey-comb formation nest. Sometimes (as in the case of the white ant) they are real hills, and in parts of the Northern Territory have been known to reach fifteen feet in height.

If you are misguided enough to choose an ant bed as a resting place you are in for a rough spin. But under normal conditions they will not attack anybody away from their nests.

You will readily understand, however, that, being carnivorous, they will very quickly make a meal off anybody who is so unfortunate as to be wounded and helpless. They seem to have scouts out, and it is remarkable how quickly the news gets around that there is a feast afoot; for in very little time after an animal or human is incapacitated countless thousands of ants will be attacking the body.

Such occurrences are not common, for a man is seldom so helpless or so alone that the ants can't be beaten off. But there is little doubt that many a poor devil has had his last hours made a veritable torture by the larger ants; and many a wounded man has spent industrious hours in fighting them off while waiting for assistance to arrive.

Ritz

QUALITY cars and quality prices.

Request:—"I would certainly appreciate if you would tell me the price (or approximate price) of a Rolls-Royce.

I understand this is an English made car. Are they manufactured only in England and exported to the States on demand, or are they manufactured over here?

Will you also name the highest priced American car and the highest priced European car?"

—S. J. P., Jefferson City, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. E. B. Neil:—While the Locomobile is the most expensive all American car manufactured on a regular basis in this country today the American Rolls-Royce manufactured in Springfield, Mass., more or less as a duplicate of the well known British car of that name, is somewhat more expensive.

The prices for American Rolls-Royce cars, while ordinarily only given on application, are usually considered to be $10,900 for the chassis, with prices for complete cars ranging from about $13,000 upwards. The Locomobile 90 horse power car in the collapsible cabriolet model is priced at $7,750. Other bodies on this same chassis range from $5,900 up. Several models of the Pierce-Arrow 36 car are listed at prices in excess of $6,600, the French Landeau being priced at $8,000.

While, as stated above, the Locomobile may be considered more expensive than the Pierce-Arrow, the latter makes this one model at a few hundred dollars more than the Locomobile. At the same time, I believe that Pierce-Arrow manufactures more cars per year than Locomobile of the models in this higher price class. Hence, it is pretty hard to say which of these two makes may be considered the "highest priced American car."

While the Rolls-Royce is distinctly a British car, a limited number of these vehicles are manufactured in this country at the Springfield plant mentioned above. It is my understanding that the American made cars are almost identical with those made in England, with the exception of certain alterations to meet the requirements incident to the American market, such as left hand drive.

In view of the fact that many foreign cars are sold as "chassis only," it is difficult here also to definitely say that one or another make is more expensive. The chassis only price of the British Daimler is 1850 pounds sterling, or about $8,970.00. That of the Hispano-Suiza (Spanish), is listed in England as costing 1950 pounds sterling. A similar price for the Italian Isotta-Fraschini car is quoted for delivery in England. The German Mercedes-Daimler supercharged 6 cylinder chassis sells for 2000 pounds sterling in England, while the English Rolls-Royce chassis is listed at 1850 pounds sterling. In the case of the Italian, French, and German cars mentioned above, transportation charges from the factory to

Great Britain are undoubtedly included in the prices quoted, so it would appear that the British Daimler 12 cylinder, 50 horse power double six chassis is the most expensive European vehicle at the present time. While I have quotations on some of the above cars given in the currency of the country of origin, the variations in exchange and other elements involved apparently make these values less correct than to give you actual prices taken from sales records of cars delivered in England.

The above cars are thus regularly sold, and are available to anyone having the price. I mention this, since one or two foreign makers will build up special jobs at whatever price the customer is willing to pay. I know of one case where the equivalent of over $25,000 was spent for a special Italian car made to order.

I might mention also that some of the special built racing cars made in this country sell for figures in excess of $10,000, but these can hardly be considered in the class with the others mentioned above.

Klean-Bore Cartridges

A HIGH recommendation. Penetration and range of a .22 revolver.

Request:—"1. What do you think of the new .22 shells—Klean-bore and other makes? Can you really let a gun go and not clean it. I don't like the idea; these shells seem to leave a white deposit on the chamber and wherever the powder hits, and this is very hard to get off.

2. I have a Colt .22 target pistol 4½ inch barrel; it seems to shoot wild after about 50 shells have gone through it. Would this happen with any gun? I shoot 50 and then clean it. Is it the fault of the gun? (I use long rifles.)

3. About what is the penetration with the above gun, using long rifles?

4. Accurate range of this gun?

—C. W., Jermyn, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I use the .22 Klean-bore cartridges in all my rifles, and my .22 Smith & Wesson revolver; I have used them for over a year, as well as the center fire ones in both high and low power, and they are exactly as indicated. No rust nor pitting has appeared. You can rest content that weapons used with the Klean-bore ammunition are safe from any bad after-effects.

I have found Peters, U. S., and Western of the non-rusting type equally reliable.

2. I am inclined to believe that if your .22 Colt revolver is inaccurate, the barrel is to blame, if you keep the revolver clean and use good fresh ammunition. Probably a new barrel will overcome the trouble, and will not cost much, either.

3. I have no figures on the penetration with the .22 long in a revolver, but believe it will penetrate about two inches of soft pine, from my own experiences.

4. I think you will find the revolver in this caliber accurate for fifty yards, if used with the .22 long rifle load in some of the five good makes. Of course they will throw a bullet a great distance if well elevated; I don't care to say how far I've dropped bullets close to a mark with my .22 Smith & Wesson revolver with six-inch barrel.

Great Lakes

EMPLOYMENT on the Lake boats.

Request:—"I am thinking of working on the Great Lakes. My idea is to get all the experience I can on the Lake boats and then join the Merchant Marine.

I have never had any experience in seamanship but served with the Marines in France in the War. Where would I apply for work on the Lakes and when would be the best time?

What would my duties be and what is the way to start?"—IRA J. FRIEND, Perrysburg, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. H. E. Gardner:—As I am not sure where Perrysburg is located I will give you the addresses of several Ohio shipping points.

Cleveland—1405 W. 9th St. Toledo—511 Summit St. Conneaut—183¼ Park Ave.

Shipping on Lake boats is regulated by The Lake Carriers Association, and you must apply at one of their shipping offices for membership in same; the fee is one dollar. After you are once a member you are shipped out as your turn comes; being inexperienced makes no difference as you would be rated as an Ordinary Seaman for the first eighteen months, and when a call comes for an Ordinary Seaman experience seldom counts.

Your duties depend on which end of the ship you prefer to work—forward end: deck-hand, paint, scrub, pull hatches; handle mooring cobbler, and then paint and scrub some more, but not bad really. Pay, $77.00 per month.

After end: coal passer, pull ashes, shine brass, shovel coal, and then shovel more. Pay, $75.00 per month.

The work is very healthful and the food usually excellent, hours of work, forward end, 9 hours, Sundays and holidays off, except when taking on or discharging cargo and during emergencies, and then overtime is paid or time off taken out. After ends work straight watches of three hours on and six off; work seven days a week.

The experience ought to be helpful to you in getting into the Merchant Marine, although the methods used are slightly different.

Feathers

KILLING eagles for the bounty on them would not seem to be remunerative, but here's a man who bagged over four hundred of them in a single season.

Request:—"I am anxious to secure some good eagle feathers if available at any time, but do not

pluck the tail feathers—just cut them out at the butt, leaving them all bunched together, as the soft down feathers are necessary, and as much more as can be had. If you can possibly secure some, it will be very much appreciated.

I have been securing some in the West here, but in small quantities, so if you can possibly oblige me whatever price is just in procuring them will be gladly paid."

—LITTLE BISON, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—I think you may be able to secure all the eagle feathers you may need from this coastal region. It may take some time before they begin to reach you, but the result is fairly sure. There are still plenty of eagles here—of two varieties, the bald and the golden. There is a bounty on them of $1.00, and many are killed each year for this bounty. Claws only are needed to collect the bounty.

Some few men here and there even make a business of killing eagles for the bounty, or did so a short time ago. One "Eagle" Johnson took over 400 in one season, so he told me. Also, I understand there used to be other cash paid for heads and wing-pairs, at 50c each, though I can't say if this is still in force. Fraternal orders, no doubt.

By inserting a paid ad in several of the coastal town news sheets, I'm sure you'll get immediate results next summer. The several newspapers might be willing to act in capacity of agent and they are reliable in every case.

Probably you'd need to offer 50c each for entire tails, the ad to state briefly how the feathers must be taken. You would thus notify hunters, trappers, fishermen, lumberjacks, pleasure cruisers and travelers through this region, in an inexpensive way and could learn at same time if the editors care to act as agents.

Mountaineering

DR. FORDYCE gives us an interesting and instructive essay on "light" rations.

When you outfit for more than a three-day trip, take self-rising flour instead of bread for the rest of the trip after the third day, in the ratio of 12 oz. a day for each man. If a pound a day of fresh meat can not be obtained where you are going, substitute bacon, salt pork, corned beef, boned chicken, salmon, in such proportions as to afford some variety in your diet. Variety of grub is most important; for any food that palls from over-use is bad for you, no matter how nutritious it may be when used judiciously. Few men can (and none should) stomach either bacon or corned willie or goldfish three times a day.

Mountaineering is the hardest of all problems in outfitting, save only Arctic sledge journeys. Every ounce counts. You will have no time to hunt or fish, unless that is all you are going for and you give your whole attention to it. Therefore you will have no fresh meat and you must carry preserved meats for the whole trip. Moreover, you may have to carry everything on your own back. Then every ounce counts.

Twenty-five years of mountaineering have taught me that the minimum of subsistence for a man is two pounds a day of actual food, not including weight of containers. In that time I have tried in my own stomach, on actual climbing trips, about every kind of condensed ration that science, on the one hand, and unbaked theory, on the other, have contrived. Nearly all of them were failures.

The fruit of this experience is that, for my own use, I have settled on the standard ration given below. Practically it works fine. Every item in it has a maximum food value, of its kind. All of them are wholesome. They balance well, providing the necessary proteins, fats, carbohydrates, mineral salts and vitamins, in the right proportions; so that a man can go on indefinitely, using this ration, and maintain his health and strength, without any additions picked up by the way.

Probably you are not interested in the "why" of the thing; but your medical adviser, if you have one, might be pleased to know that this ration contains, by weight, 4.53 oz. protein, 6.71 oz. fat, 18.54 oz. carbohydrates, per man per day. The rest of the 48 oz. is water and mineral salts. The ration provides 4,448 calories a day, which is enough body fuel to keep a man going on very hard work—which is just what mountaineering is.

Here it is:

MOUNTAINEERING RATION

(One Man, One Day)

3	oz.	Bacon, trimmed
3	"	Ham, "
*3	"	Boned Chicken, canned
*2	"	Butter, canned
*6	"	Evaporated Milk, canned
2	"	Powdered Egg (Reelegg)
3	"	Cereal (Oatmeal, Wheat or Rice)
10	"	Self-Rising Flour
2	"	Granulated Sugar
2	"	Maple Sugar (or Sweet Chocolate)
2	"	Figs, round, not layer
2	"	Raisins
2	"	Prunes
3	"	Lemon (one lemon a day)
*2	"	Coffee, ground
* 1/4	"	Tea
* 3/4	"	Salt, Pepper
48	oz.	

Of course, it would be possible to cut down the weight a little more by using powdered milk instead of evaporated. But personally I don't fancy it, and it is not so handy to use as the ordinary canned stuff. The milk is to be used on cereal, in coffee and in cooking. It pays its freight.

The articles starred on the list are packed in tin cans. Bacon and ham are best carried in parchment paper, which is grease-proof. The other things go in bags, which weigh very little.

If you choose, you can substitute corned beef for part of the ham; but figure on the weight of the can; also on the fact that when a can is opened you must use up all of the contents in one day, or throw it away. A man going alone must think of such things.

Old sourdoughs may mock at the butter. That is just because they've done without it and don't know any better. Butter is the most highly concentrated source of energy that a man can use three times a day, and day after day, without tiring of it. And it is far wholesomer than fat pork, which is the sourdough's substitute. Carry it in a pry-up tin. If it melts, let it melt. Put it in the spring or brook as soon as you reach camp. Then it will keep sweet a good while.

Powdered egg makes good scrambled eggs or omelette. It makes a new and tasty dish when combined with other items of the ration, which otherwise might soon pall on the appetite. It is very concentrated nutriment, and, unlike most emergency rations, it is wholesome at all times.

Simitar

THE Arabic school of swordsmanship.

Request:—"How long, how heavy, and how much of a curve did the famous simitars of the Saracens have, that we read so much about in history? Were they equal to the rapiers or sabers of Christian nations? Could they be used to thrust with at all? Would the greater cutting power of the curve compensate for the loss of thrust in a straight blade in battle? Were the simitars about the same length as the ordinary sword?

It is often recorded in the days of the Crusaders, and since that, as swordsmen the Arabic races were equal to any others in the world and superior to many, despite the odd appearance of their blades. Is that a fact?"

—BRUCE LITTLE, Unalaska, Alaska.

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—The simitar of the Turk and Persian is a short single edged curved blade usually broadest at the point ends. The greatest thickness of the blade is not at the back but about midway or one-third way from the edge where it gradually diminishes toward the back. The length of the blade measured along the chord of its curve averages 27 inches. The average tangent of a 27-in. blade is 25¼ inches.

They were perhaps the keenest European weapons of the cutting classification and were designed for use against the light armed Orientals. For this use they were perhaps superior to the sabers of the Christian nations.

The Arabic races were schooled in an entirely different school of swordsmanship. Their entire military science was based on speed and mobility. They were armed and equipped to strike suddenly a slashing blow without great power and were at a decided disadvantage when opposed to the heavily armed Christian knights.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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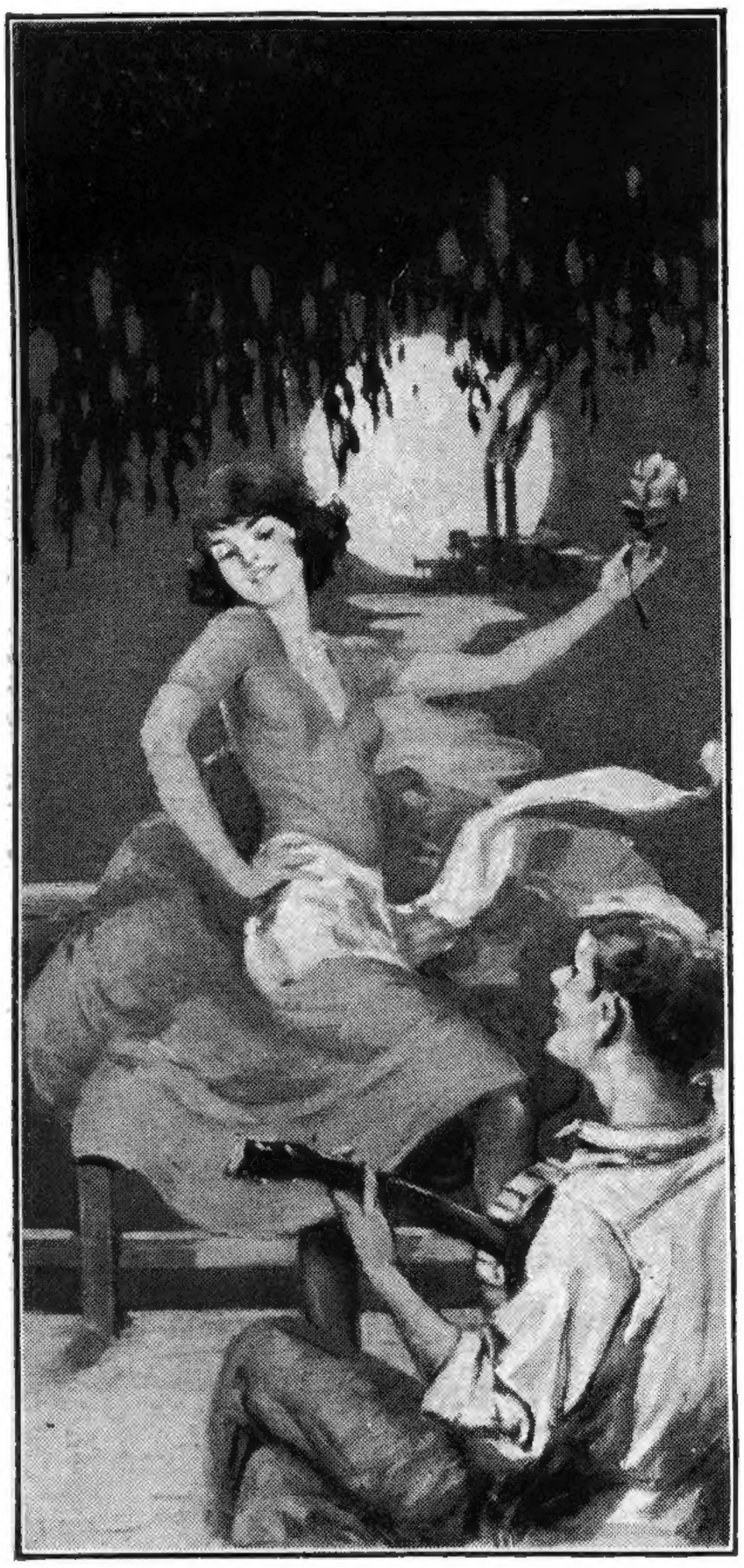

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